UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CONJURING POWER
IN CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

Karen Halil

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 1999

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39535-9

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Karen Halil

Title of Thesis: Conjuring Power in Caribbean and African-American Literature

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year this Degree Granted: 1999

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Karen Halil
8 Lancaster Street #22
Cambridge, MA
United States, 02140

16 December 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Conjuring Power in Caribbean and African-American Literature submitted by Karen Halil in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Professor S. Neuman

Professor J. Perreault

Professor S. Slemon

Professor D. Read

Professor G. Lang

Professor L. Sanders

Sept 28/98
Date

To my parents, Irene and Ilyas Halil

Abstract:
Conjuring Power in Caribbean and African-American Literature

What is the role of folk religion in Caribbean and African-American literature? To contemporary Caribbean and African-American writers, as to none before, magico-religious practices can inspire writers to depict, explore, and challenge power relations between colonizer and colonized, men and women, whites and blacks. Not all writers see in folk religions positive poetic potential; however, this dissertation focuses on authors who turn to magico-religious practices in order to fashion counter-discourses to dominant ideologies.

The dissertation's argument takes a two-pronged, interdisciplinary approach to the study of folk religions. It turns first to the cultural study of magico-religious practices in order to ground the study of resistance in history and to tailor its analysis specifically to the differences of the Caribbean and African America. Deploying postcolonial concepts of resistance articulated by theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, I trace a variety of meanings about magical practices created by dominant Eurocentric ideologies *and* subordinated slave communities. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Eurocentric groups, for example, created meanings about West African religions that entrenched their own sense of superiority and furthered the development of colonialist assumptions about self and other. Antebellum slave communities, however, created meanings about magico-religious practices that provided subordinated "others" with a sense of power. Malleable, fickle, and ambivalent, the magico-religious practices of folk

religions such as Vodun, Myal, Obeah, Revival, and Hoodoo prove to be particularly suggestive and imaginatively provocative, as they are syncretic practices that can be used as curse or blessing, violence or healing, oppression or resistance.

Following its historical analysis of folk religions, the dissertation then maps the literary development of depictions of magico-religious practices in the twentieth century. Tracing the cumulative development from early twentieth-century black literature to contemporary writing, this study analyzes Claude McKay's *A Long Way From Home*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*, Erna Brodber's *Myal*, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. It argues that the representation of magico-religious practices has moved cumulatively through three incarnations--as writing, as history, and as gender--to become transformed into a modality of magical writing by contemporary Caribbean and African-American women writers.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Shirley Neuman, for all of her help and gracious support. Not only has she been an astute and rigorous reader, critic, and editor of my work, she has always been a supportive and encouraging supervisor--for which I will always be enormously grateful.

I would also like to thank Jeanne Perreault, for agreeing to co-supervise this dissertation and for consistently providing insightful readings of my theoretical framework, thereby allowing me to develop my ideological methodology in useful and productive ways.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee members, Stephen Slemon and Daphne Read, for their incisive and perceptive readings of the dissertation draft which enabled me to put the finishing touches on the thesis.

At Harvard, I would like to thank Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Cornel West, and Werner Sollors for offering helpful advice and direction on my work, and for encouraging my teaching and research.

At the University of Alberta, I would like to thank Sue Fisher and Teya Rosenberg. Laughing over lattes, sharing cinnabons whenever possible, and taking long, circuitous walks made my time in Edmonton a delight. I would also like to thank Cliff Lobe, whose keen and cantankerous running commentary, along with his affection, kept me on my toes throughout this process.

I would like to thank Anne Hallward, my childhood friend: I am so glad you were here in Boston to share this part of my life with me. Rina Amiri, I'd like to thank you for always being there with your sense of humor, high spirits, and treasured friendship whenever the writing process, or anything else, got to be too much. To my dear friends, Terri Oliver, Mary Anne Boelcskevy, and Jennifer Burton: the cumulation of your discerning readings and editing, your criticism on various drafts, and your talking through ideas have been invaluable. More than that, however, the wit, wisdom, grace, and loyalty of our friendship have made being a graduate student a wonderful experience.

And finally, I cannot thank my family enough. To the remarkably gracious, generous, and intelligent people whom I am lucky enough to call my parents: your love, support, and encouragement have been the foundation that has made any and all of my endeavors possible. To my sister Monica, your good sense, sound advice, and loyal heart have always worked to keep me on track. And to the twins, Katya and Marissa, who talked me, walked me, and never stopped laughing with me through this--what can I say? You are my right and left hands. I would also like to thank the "other" Halil family, Charlo and Nelly, and my "brothers" Alex and Roland, for your support and affection.

Table of Contents

Dissertation Abstract

Introduction 1

Part 1:

Chapter 1:
A Theory and History of Magico-Religious Practices 38

Part 11:

Chapter 2:
Representations of Writing
in Claude McKay's *A Long Way From Home* and
Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* 82

Chapter 3:
Representations of History
in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and
Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* 122

Chapter 4:
Representations of Gender
in Erna Brodber's *Myal* and
Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* 169

Conclusion 208

Bibliography 215

Introduction

Despite her avid delight in an ex-slave's stories of conjure, Annie in Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* cannot fully relinquish her adherence to received notions of reality.[1] She attempts to convince herself that the magic in Uncle Julius's story is "mere ornamental detail and not at all essential" (92). This early collection of stories uses the practice of magic as a focal point to reveal how both the dominant and the subordinate groups create stories and meanings to strengthen their own sense of power. The dominant group, for instance, invents narratives to convince itself and others that its power is a natural right and its ideology an absolute truth. In *The Conjure Woman*, John, a white plantation owner and Annie's husband, uses a patronizing language of reason and common sense when referring to Julius's stories about magic. Says John of Julius's tales, "some of these stories are quaintly humorous; others wildly extravagant, revealing the Oriental cast of the Negro's imagination" (46).[2] Through such adjectives as "wild," "extravagant," "Oriental," and "ornamental," John orientalizes Julius's stories as outlandish and mythologizes his own stories as common sense.[3] The members of the dominant group, however, are not the only ones to create ideological discourses that validate their own assumptions and beliefs. Julius is also a story-teller who creates truths and narratives around the practice of magic in order to empower himself. Speaking a counter-discourse which challenges the orientalizing claims of a

rationalist vocabulary, Julius vociferously attests to the truth-factor of these stories: "I'm sorry, ma'm . . . ef you doan lack dat tale. I can't make out w'at you means by some er dem wo'ds you uses, but I'm tellin' nuffin' but de truf" (79).[4] In response to John's skepticism about the magical power of a rabbit's foot, Julius parodies John's appeal to common sense: ""Law, suh! you doan hafter prove 'bout-de rabbit foot! Eve'y body knows dat' leas' ways eve'ybody roun' heah knows it" (84). According to Julius, his stories are true for they are believed by many people. His testimony exposes the actual particularity of claims of universality: common sense beliefs are common only to a certain group of people.

I begin with the example of Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* to reveal how magical folk practices inspire both the dominant and subordinate groups to tell stories about their own ability to know reality in truthful and objective ways. It is not only fictional characters who deploy folk religion to their advantage, however; Chesnutt himself expressly states in his diaries that he uses folk religion to contest the dominant group's racist assumptions about black inferiority.[5] His work is particularly interesting as a point of entry into this study as it marks an early moment of transition in African-American literature away from middle-class disdain for folk religion toward a recognition of its potential significance in literature. In a diary entry of 1875, Chesnutt comments that black Southern "uneducated people are the most bigoted, superstitious, hardest-headed people in the world" because they

"believe in ghosts, luck, horse shoes, cloud-signs, witches, and all other kinds of nonsense, and all the argument in the world couldn't get it out of them."[6] Five years later, however, upon reading Albion Tourgee's *Fool's Errand*, he comes to recognize, albeit grudgingly, the importance of folk religion as a literary tool to counter racial stereotypes. Contemplating the possible political significance of the depiction of folk religion in local color fiction, he comments, "I think there is a fund of experience, a supply of material, which a skillful pen would work up with tremendous effect" (*Pioneer* 21). He is careful to emphasize that his literary transformation of folk religion is aimed at the dominant group--not at "the elevation of the colored people," but rather at "the elevation of the whites" who believe that the "chief virtues" of "full-blooded" Negroes "have been their dog-like fidelity to their old master, for whom they have been willing to sacrifice almost life itself" (*Pioneer* 57).

Chesnutt's work illustrates a consistent and increasing tendency in African-American literature to depict magico-religious practices. In the past thirty years, literary interest in folk religion has experienced something of a growing trend in Caribbean and African-American literature--especially in the work of women writers who have transformed folk religion into a literary weapon for change, and a figurative site for black women's power. In a statement that could be extended to apply to a wide range of Caribbean and African-American women authors, Toni Morrison makes a point about the purpose of her work. She writes,

> [i]f my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West--discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as 'lore' or 'magic' or 'sentiment.' ("Memory, Creation, and Writing" 388)

Contemporary Caribbean and African-American women writers, however, are not the only ones to centralize discredited information and to represent magico-religious practices such as Obeah, Myal, Hoodoo, and Vodun in their literature. Since the first slaves stepped foot on New World soil, folk religion has occupied a privileged discursive and imaginative relationship to a concept of history and it has inspired a sense of power and meaning-making for both male and female, both Caribbean and African-American writers of different styles and with varying purposes. For example, Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*, Ann Petry's *The Street*, Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure Man Dies*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Moses Man of the Mountain*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *Beloved*, John Edgar Wideman's *Sent For You Yesterday*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, and *Bailey's Cafe*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, *The Color Purple*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*, and Jewel Parker Rhodes's *Voodoo Dreams*, to name but a few,

represent and remember a body of folk practices and beliefs. In the Caribbean and its diaspora, Ismith Khan's *Obeah Man*, Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron*, Roger Mais's *Brother Man*, V.S. Naipaul's *The Suffrage of Elvira*, Orlando Patterson's *Children of Sisyphus*, George Lamming's *Season of Adventure*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Rosa Guy's *The Sun, the Sea, and a Touch of the Wind*, Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, and Pauline Melville's *Shape-shifter*, also to name only a select list of titles, represent folk religions such as Pukumina, Obeah, Myal, Vodun, and Revival in ways that recreate in literature what was once vibrant and flourishing in slave cultures. With the disintegration of communities in contemporary America and the Caribbean, African-diasporic societies can no longer depend on oral forms such as gossip, folk religion, and folktales to provide their members with stories or "portraits" of their community, history, and tradition--portraits that foster the self-knowledge and esteem needed to hold a community together. Consequently, Caribbean and African-American writers turn to folk religion and culture as sources of poetic creativity and as sites of discursive community.[7]

Hoodoo, Myal, Obeah, and Vodun prove to be richly suggestive and provocative sources of interpretation for numerous writers and critics, who see in the shifting parameters of magico-religious practices various metaphors and metonyms to explain and elucidate Caribbean and African-American ways of being in the world. W.E.B. Du Bois, for instance, despite his Massachusetts upbringing and nineteenth-century penchant for

European "high" culture, finds in the vernacular of black American magico-religious beliefs an expression for the metaphysical and psychological condition of African Americans. His well-known interpretation of the double-consciousness of African-American identity is articulated in terms of folk beliefs. He writes: "the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with the second sight in this American world" (*Souls of Black Folk* 214). Nearly a century later, bell hooks, African-American cultural critic, also turns to folk religion to explain the doubled subjectivity and cultural oppression of black Americans. She uses a language of folk religion to redefine the notion of subjectivity through history and community. She writes,

> Discarding the notion that the self exists in opposition to an other that must be destroyed, annihilated (for when I left the segregated world of home and moved in and among white people, and their ways of knowing, I learned this way of understanding the social construction of the self), I evoked the way of knowing I had learned from unschooled southern black folks. We learned that the self existed in relation, was dependent for its very being on the lives and experiences of everyone, the self not as signifier of one "I" but the coming together of many "I's", the self as embodying collective reality past and present, family and community. Social construction of the self in relation would mean, then, that we would know the voices that speak in and to us from the past, that we would be in touch with

> what Paule Marshall calls "our ancient properties"--our history. Yet it is precisely these voices that are silenced, suppressed, when we are dominated. It is this collective voice we struggle to recover. (*Talking Back* 30-1)

Hooks's reference to the voices that speak from the past evokes the spirits of the dead who ride or possess folk doctors and folk religion believers. Rather than a self that denies historical discourse, or a self that imagines itself by annihilating the other, she imagines a self which is created in relation to others. She thus creates a concept of subjectivity that is shaped by socio-historical discourses, that is possessed by ancestors, and that is formed by community and tradition.[8]

The imaginative complexity of magico-religious beliefs that suggests itself and appeals so evocatively to Caribbean and African-American writers is commented upon by Carolyn Cooper, who argues that Caribbean texts such as Una Marson's unpublished 1938 play *Pocomania*, Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron*, and Erna Brodber's *Myal* recuperate identity through the reappropriation of devalued folk wisdom ("'Something Ancestral Recaptured': Spirit Possession as Trope in Selected Feminist Fictions of the African Diaspora" 65). In the tradition of Wilson Harris's work, Hebron claims that the metaphor of spirit possession "doubly signifies both the dislocation and rearticulation of Afro-centric culture in the Americas" (64). Arguing that representations of spirit possession illustrate "the authority of metaphors of transport in Afro-

American/Caribbean iconography," Cooper points out that these writers use the trope of spirit possession to "make that liberating leap from fact and history into myth and metaphor" (64).

Not all Caribbean and African-American writers necessarily use magical practices to make that liberating leap, however. For Toni Morrison, for example, folk religion provides a way to challenge binary oppositions of irrationality versus reason, but for V.S. Naipaul it does not.[9] In *The Suffrage of Elvira*, Naipaul depicts folk religion with comic intent. In the novel, folk beliefs in the power of Obeah are manipulated by Naipaul to show the credulity, simplicity, and confusion of the inhabitants of the Elvira. The residents of Elvira assume that an small innocent dog is an evil harbinger of malevolent magic. While Naipaul's novel shows inventiveness through its comic vision, the text does not imaginatively explore the creative possibilities of the supernatural, nor does it validate the power and strength that a folk religion can bring to its believers. Magico-religious practices, then, are not always depicted as sources of resistance to received ideology, nor as a valid source of knowledge by Caribbean and African-American writers. In Fisher's *The Conjure Man Dies*, the magic of folk religion proves to be the counterfeit result of the trickery of a con-artist. Furthermore, in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, magico-religious beliefs are listed as a series of superstitions of the uneducated, to be used, as Robert Stepto points out, as a point of departure and not of destination, as a stepping stone

along the path to literacy (*From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* 144-45).

Folk religions, then, can be conceived along a sliding spectrum of ideological beliefs--both received and counter-discursive. However, they can also be represented along a folded and doubled scale--representing contradictory and multiple positions at once. Numerous Caribbean and African-American writers portray conjure as a double-valenced practice, as a tool that can instigate either violence or peace, trickery or truth, oppression or resistance. For example, in *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter depicts the folk religious practices of the New Believers as a function of the failure of the ego-driven, womanizing Prophet Moses. Nonetheless, the community created by the Prophet in the hills of Hebron sustains a supportive and regenerative culture for its inhabitants. The ambivalence of folk religion is similarly depicted in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, where magic is ostensibly wielded by the charlatan Doctor Buzzard, malevolently practiced by the jealous Ruby, and benevolently deployed in healing ways by Mama Day.

There are certain Caribbean and African-American writers, then, who have recognized the doubled-sided and ambivalent nature of folk religions as a source of both colonization and resistance, but who have emphasized, in the end, the significance of magico-religious practices as imaginative sources for literary resistance. I turn my analysis to these writers. In particular, I am interested in writers who see poetic potential in folk religions--who depict folk religions

mimetically, but who also represent Obeah, Myal, and Vodun with improvisation and creativity in such ways that challenge inherited beliefs about the superiority about Eurocentric systems of beliefs and cultural practices. I am especially interested in writers who riff, improvise, and transform folk religious practices, who see in the "supernatural" the potential to denaturalize oppression, thereby revealing what Wilson Harris calls "profound revisionary capacities within and through the creative/recreative address in which Imagination resides" (*The Radical Imagination* 87).[10] In *Song of Solomon*, for example, Morrison depicts conjure woman Pilate in keeping with the beliefs about and practices of conjure doctors in the American south. An eccentric, shape-shifting woman who stands outside of conventional society, Pilate creates and administers successful love potions and speaks to the dead. At the same time, Morrison also depicts Pilate as a woman without a navel--a detail that is the product of Morrison's own fertile imagination and which cannot be traced to existing folk beliefs about the bodies of conjurers. This innovative detail is nonetheless in keeping with the world views of conjure doctors, who conceptualize the body as a source of power and as a site of magical manipulation. Morrison uses the practice of conjure to reveal how bodies are shaped and revised by competing cross-cultural discourses. An imaginative flourish inspired by conjure, her depiction of the absent navel challenges inherited notions, as I shall explain in chapter four, about gender and bodies as essential and natural things.

My choice of authors and texts in this dissertation is shaped by several considerations. Aside from favoring writers who see imaginative potential in folk religion as a counter discourse, I have selected authors who have a revisionary relationship to three black cultural nationalist movements: the Harlem Renaissance, the Negritude movement, and the Black Arts movement. Writers of these movements depict folk cultures, religions, and practices as sites of resistance. However, as I shall explain in further detail in subsequent chapters, proponents of these movements often adhere to a notion of resistance that locates itself within the possibility of a racialized essence. That is, more often than not, writers such as Alain Locke, Leopold Sedar Senghor, and Amiri Baraka argue that there are static notions and essential concepts of blackness captured within folk practices. I am interested in those writers who stand in (oppositional) relation to these cultural nationalist movements, who see in folk religion a discursive potential of flexibility and ambivalence. For this reason, I turn to Claude McKay (a Jamaican writer) and Zora Neale Hurston (an African-American writer), who were part of the Harlem Renaissance, but who were also criticized by other members of this movement for their portrayals of black people and folk practices. Wilson Harris (a Guyanese writer) and Charles Johnson (an African-American author) both conceive of their writing in revisionary relationship to cultural national movements. Harris challenges precepts about the essence of blackness upheld by the writers of the Negritude movement, and

he advocates that writers activate their syncretic imaginations and cull from cross-cultural traditions (see the Harris's *Womb of Space* and *The Radical Imagination*). Johnson calls into question the fixity of essentialist notions in the Black Arts movements and argues that black writers should decry the linearity of realism and incorporate syncretic literary forms into their fiction (see *Being and Race*). Finally, I turn to Erna Brodber (a Jamaican writer) and Toni Morrison (an African-American writer), major women writers of color who belong to what has been called the second era in black women's writing. Both writers challenge the androcentricism evinced by black writerly and artistic communities and black cultural nationalist movements. Through their literature, Brodber and Morrison reclaim an inclusive community of cross-cultural influences; they remember history in order to reinscribe the place and the power of the female ancestor.

Furthermore, my choice of particular texts has been governed by thematic similarities and connections. I investigate three main themes associated with folk religions in a counter-discursive challenge to received ideology in the twentieth century: folk religions as writing, as history, and as gender. I argue that the depiction of these themes occurs cumulatively over the course of the twentieth century. I pair Caribbean and African-American texts that inscribe similar themes in folk religion: the first chapter examines the representation of folk religion as writing in Claude McKay's *A Long Way from Home* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*. The second chapter

analyzes the depictions of history in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*. Finally, the third chapter focuses on the assocation of folk religion with gender in Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. These depictions occur in tandem with and reaction against cultural nationalist depictions of folk religion by the Negritude movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts movement which conceived of folk religion in ahistoricized and static ways. This trajectory marks an overall, but not linear or straightforward, development of folk religion in African-diasporic literature. There are overlapping and contradictory instances of the representations of folk religion over the course of the century. What is most striking is the way that contemporary Caribbean and African-American women writers gather all of these elements of the ideological potential of folk religion into a multi-faceted portrayal that stresses the intersections of race and gender in twentieth-century America and the Caribbean.

Finally, I select texts that evince textual and narrative similarities. I turn to Claude McKay's *Home From Harlem* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* because both authors specifically delineate and name folk practices as the (partial) origin of their writing, inspiration, and creativity. Both autobiographies reveal a kind of doubled and contradictory ideology that points towards an inscription of the constructedness of black experience, but which does not fully escape certain suggestions that "blackness" can be associated

with a fixed essence. Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Johnson's *Middle Passage* depict magical ship voyages in which the main protagonists undergo a shift in their relationship to their thinking and existence. Both texts, moreover, marvelously illustrate the two authors' philosophies about writing, culture, and imagination. Brodber's *Myal* and Morrison's *Song of Solomon* examine the relationship of magic to bodies. Both novels depict the doubled nature of magical practices, but ultimately emphasize the healing nature of magic as a way to remember history and to connect the individual to larger communities of shared values.[11]

In my study of folk religion as writing, history, and gender in six texts that range across certain historical periods, I point out the moments of intersection and commonality between writers of the Caribbean and African America. In this study, I do not intend to create an exhaustive, overarching, or linear trajectory of development and influence of the depiction of folk religions across the Caribbean and African America. Such a project about the differences in representations of folk religion in the Caribbean and African America is an important one, but exceeds the scope of this project, which sets up the preliminary framework by which a comparison can be made in the first place. The differences between the two regions need to be taken into account not only insofar as African America and the Caribbean have different histories, cultures, literary inheritances, but also insofar as the region of the Caribbean is itself fraught with cultural, historical, and literary

complexities and differences which should not be collapsed into totalizing unities.[12] Building on the work of Bernice Reagon Johnson, Gay Wilentz argues that culture itself offers a methodology for examining connections across the diaspora ("Toward a Diaspora Literature" 387). Magico-religious practices are but one element in this cultural transmission. Despite the differences in the manifestations of folk religions throughout the Caribbean and African America, writers from these regions attempt to remember and to represent the practices as part of an imaginative cultural heritage that links them, in either Afro-centric or creolized fashion, to a slave past and to an African heritage. Ashraf Rushdy's claim that African-American writers have in common a political and aesthetic impulse to remember history and to validate the ancestor can be extended to encompass Caribbean writers as well (see "Daughters Signifyin(g) History"). In "The Muse Of History," for instance, Derek Walcott discusses the ways that Caribbean writers focus on remembering history in their literature. He criticizes nostalgic recollections of history that reinforce colonialist thinking and he advocates that writers should acknowledge the many cross-cultural influences that have created New World societies, as does Wilson Harris who possesses what he calls "a purging pessimism which goes beyond the morbid" and who demonstrates "an optimistic or visionary force . . . [that is] a slow naming" (24). In African America, Toni Morrison writes about her desire and indeed her duty to remember history. She states, if "my work is to be functional to the group (to the village, as it were)

then it must bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded; it must make it possible to prepare for the present and live it out" ("Rootedness" 389).

By turning my study of resistance to the study of representations of folk religions, I focus on magico-religious practices as a source for cultural explanation. Up until this point in African-American criticism, the focus on indigenous black cultural forms as an explanation for black literature has rested mostly on music and folk tales. Although there have been some critical discussions on its representation, folk religion has not been examined in any systematic way as a theoretical, historical, and literary model of resistance.[13] In their introduction to *Conjuring*, Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers use conjure as a metaphor for black writing, but neither the metaphor of conjuring nor the literary representations of folk religion are mentioned in subsequent essays which comprise the collection. The word conjuring proves to be a catchy metaphor, but not a thoroughly or theoretically investigated literary practice that embodies an ideology of resistance to the dominant group. Baker also examines folk religion as a site for creativity in one chapter in *Workings of the Spirit*, but he examines the depiction of conjure solely in relationship to black women's fictional creativity--to Hurston's fiction and then later to Walker, Morrison, and Marshall. Consequently, he appears to essentialize and to feminize the practice as a function of women's (reproductive) abilities. One could easily

conclude from his work that the representation of conjure occurs only in black *women's* literature.[14] I argue that black women's articulation of the principles of black feminism is only one part of a complex, multiple literary focus on and ideological representation of folk religion. Wilson Harris, whom I examine later in my dissertation, is helpful to my analysis, for he examines folk religion as a theory for history for the third world in "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guyanas." While Harris conceives of folk religion as philosophy of history, however, he does not go on to examine the representation of folk religion in literature. While many critics have recognized the dramatic and provocative nature of folk religion, then, they have not explored folk religion systematically as a philosophy of resistance *and* as a representational strategy in the literary history of the Caribbean and African America.

Theorizing and Historicizing Resistance

In this dissertation, my focus is on the act of resistance. Is it a simple act that can be easily located within the text? Is it a straightforward, unproblematic act that is instigated purely by the free will of the dispossessed? Does it articulate itself solely in terms of a subordinate culture which is authentically native and uninfluenced by the dominant culture? My analysis of folk religion as literary resistance is informed by postcolonial concepts about the contestatory act.[15]

The focus of my work is not the explication or analysis of theory, but theoretical concepts do inform my readings of folk religion as resistance in history and literature. Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha have theorized about the complex nature of resistance in ways that are extremely useful to understanding literary inscriptions of resistance, for their work encourages movement outward from a thematic reading of literature to a consideration of the political, social, and ideological implications of literature. Through her investigation of the Indian practice of bride burning in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", for example, Spivak argues that the subaltern woman is overdetermined by race, caste, and gender, that the subaltern cannot speak in a voice uninflected by history. Spivak claims that there is no native culture that can free itself of colonial history, no voice that can speak without the influences of predominant social ideologies. Furthermore, Bhabha argues that colonial discourse is not hegemonic, that it is ambivalent and contradictory. Arguing that the dominant discourse's creation of and obsession over the racial stereotype reveal the colonial group's anxiety about its own sense of power and vulnerability, Bhabha writes that the colonial stereotype "gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it" ("The Other Question" 75).

While postcolonial theory is a critical tool that encourages subtle and political readings of literature, however,

it can also efface historical particulars and cultural differences. Critics as diverse as Anne McClintock, Stephen Slemon, and Helen Tiffin have pointed out that postcolonial theory has an imperializing tendency to colonize literature with its jargon, abstract terms, and generalized theories--a tendency that can lead to the propagation of dominant productions of knowledge, the effacement of cultural difference, and the marginalization of alternative epistemologies.[16] In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock criticizes the ahistorical tendencies of postcolonial studies when she identifies the problematic generality of the field. She argues that postcolonial studies' "inscription of history around a single 'continuity of preoccupations' and 'a common past' runs the risk of a fetishistic disavowal of crucial international distinctions that are barely understood and inadequately theorized" (12).[17] Similarly, Slemon and Tiffin argue that postcolonial theory encourages a "wholesale retreat from geography and history into a domain of pure 'textuality' in which the principle of indeterminacy smothers the possibility of social or political 'significance' for literature (Introduction to *After Europe*).

Most critics acknowledge that it is important to historicize theory, to use theoretical concepts without effacing cultural differences, without colonizing literature. Some contemporary African-American critics have provided suggestions for how to do so. In a vein similar to postcolonial critics, certain literary critics have cautioned against the wholesale application of Western theory onto the literature of the African

diaspora. Eschewing the use of theory altogether, Barbara Christian's article "The Race for Theory" is an early but standard work that articulates the dangers of theory's tendency to alienate the minority writer with its algebraic equations and impenetrable language.[18] Later African-American critical works take a different tactic. Critics such as Houston A. Baker and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. have encouraged other critics to locate a trope or symbol from the black tradition that can be used to encapsulate and theorize black literary traditions; they have called upon critics to cull concepts from an African-inspired culture and tradition in order to create theories about literature and meaning-making. In this way, theories about Caribbean and African-American literature can be grounded in a discredited history--theoretical authority can be partially located in African-inspired worldviews rather than solely in Western forms of knowledge or systems of thought. Baker and Gates argue that each literary tradition contains its own theoretical or cultural argument for how to read. Gates, for example, points out that the "critic of the Afro-American literature should not shy away from literary theory, but rather . . . translate it into the black idiom, renaming principles of criticism where appropriate, but especially naming indigenous black principles of criticism and applying these to explicate our own texts" (Introduction to *Figures in Black*). He locates the Signifying Monkey in African-American folk stories, a trickster figure who constantly puns and tropes, as a symbol for

the poststructuralist principle that language is indeterminate and ambiguous.

In this dissertation, I develop a related position by locating in folk religions principles of postcolonial theories of resistance as ambivalent, syncretic, and constructed. Magico-religious practices provide me with a frame through which to rename postcolonial theoretical principles of resistance, to expose the complexity and complicity of the act of resistance. I examine the history of the discourses surrounding the practice of magic in European, West African, Caribbean, and African-American contexts. I investigate Christian concepts surrounding the medieval practice of magic imported to West Africa through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travel narratives. Following on the work of William Pietz, I claim that the discourse of the *fetish*, a term used to explain the religious practices of the West Africans, helped to shape colonizing notions about the inferiority of blacks and racist constructions of self and other. I then examine the discourses of empowerment that surround Caribbean and African-American practices of folk practices such as Myal, Obeah, Vodun, Revival, and Hoodoo, discourses that reveal the syncretic power of the imagination to draw from multiple cultural sources in order to create meanings that empower the dispossessed.

I turn to the representations of magical folk practices, then, in order to understand the contestatory act through the frame of discredited histories and worldviews. My study of folk religion repudiates theory's effacement of history, an

effacement that reproduces, perhaps inadvertently, the tendency of dominant groups to discredit the history and culture of the subordinated. History is a record of events that is created, imagined, and tailored by a certain perspective and imagination and then marketed as absolute truth in order to assert one's power. As Stephen Slemon argues, one of the "legacies of the colonial encounter is a notion of history as the 'few privileged monuments'[19] of achievement, which serves either to arrogate 'history' wholesale to the imperial center or to erase it from the colonial archive and produce, especially in New World cultures, a condition of 'historylessness,' of no visible history ("Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History" 158). The history of the dispossessed has been erased and devalued in many ways--and, in particular, magico-religious practices have been used as a tool in this colonial effacement. Deriving from West African religions, folk religions are systems of belief and practice around which colonial groups have concluded and justified the so-called essential historylessness of the Africans. For instance, the term *fetish* is an occidental word used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by European travellers in Africa to signify religious practices of a pagan and irrational African society--it is a term that Europeans used to write their own lie about Africa, a barometer by which they measured their cultural superiority. In the early nineteenth century, Hegel argued that African *fetish* worship proved that Africans were without history. Africans, according to Hegel, "worship the first thing that comes their way . . . it

may be an animal, a tree, a stone, or a wooden figure" (*The Philosophy of History* 99). Unable to participate in the "category of universality," West African religions demonstrated for Hegel that Africa "is no historical part of the World. . . . it has no movement or development to exhibit. . . . What we properly understand by Africa, is the unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in conditions of mere nature, and which has yet to be presented here as on the threshold of the World's History" (*Philosophy* 99). Nearly half a century later, anthropologist Melville Herskovits counteracted this belief in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), arguing that the slaves did bring rituals, beliefs, and cultural practices with them across the Atlantic--they did indeed have a history and were not *tabula rasa*. Herskovits sought to explode the myth of the Negro past which assumed, among other things, that Negro culture was too inferior to withstand its confrontation with European culture.

The study of folk religions enables me to centralize discredited histories, and, moreover, to understand (or, as Gates puts it, "translate") concepts about the nature of resistance in terms of African-diasporic beliefs, worldviews, and practices. Insofar as they combine African traditional religions *and* Christianity, folk religions such as Vodun, Myal, and Revival embody theoretical concepts about the ambivalence, plurality, and constructedness of anti-colonial discourse. Haitian Vodun, for instance, incorporates Roman Catholicism and Dahomean traditions; Obeah and Myal, Jamaican versions of folk religions, synthesize Baptist and Pan-Africanist traditions

(Schuler conjectures that Myal's African elements derive mainly from Central Africa); from Myal comes Revival, which was revitalized by the wave of Protestant Great Awakenings in Jamaica in the 1860's and which continued to incorporate West and Central African traditions. These folk religions are not pure African belief systems or practices; rather, they are dynamic, fluid, living cultures that changed in the New World to adapt to new circumstances and to harsh conditions of dispossession. Located at the intersection between cultures, in the liminal space between the dominant and subordinate groups, these folk religions are creolized--revealing that "native" cultures merge with dominant ones, that "native" cultures are living and dynamic processes that survive by changing to fit historical circumstances. Although both dominant and subordinate groups would like to believe that folk religions are purely African, Vodun, Obeah, Myal, and Revival are in fact multiple, plural, and ambivalent practices that have borrowed from numerous cultures to produce for the slave communities systems of faith, self-knowledge, and racial pride. The product of subordinate and dominant cultures, these folk religions exemplify theories of resistance and demonstrate Gayatri Spivak's and Homi Bhabha's point that resistance is never purely native or authentically other, that the counter discourse is never outside the dominant ideology.[20]

Folk religions do not only act as a template through which to translate postcolonial theory. They provide a frame through which to tailor, temper, and interrogate postcolonial theory.

They allow me to draw attention to the problems of using theory not grounded in historical example, dangers that lead to the effacement of a counter-culture of resistance. One example of postcolonial critics' use of transcendental categories lies in Bhabha's use of the term *fetish* as a synonym for the colonial stereotype. According to Bhabha, both sexual and colonial *fetishism* are based on a recognition and disavowal of difference: sexual *fetishism* is based on an anxiety over sexual difference, and racial *fetishism* on the anxiety over racial difference.[21] Bhabha, however, does not explore the historical provenance of the term *fetish* to Eurocentric denigrations of West African religious practices; he depends solely on Freud's use of the term.[22] It is on this very point that Bhabha has been criticized by Robert Young, who points out that the theorist never grounds his analysis in history.[23] As Young points out, Bhabha "speaks of the need to examine colonial discourse in psychoanalytic as well as historical terms but does not risk any account of how they might be articulated. . . . This raises the larger question posed by Bhabha's work, namely his employment of transcendental categories of psychoanalysis for the analysis of the historical phenomenon of colonialism" (*White Mythologies* 144). Young focuses, in passing, on Bhabha's use of the term *fetish* as an example of his problematic and unexamined deployment of psychoanalytic concepts and assumptions. But the *fetish* reveals more than this--it exposes a tendency to privilege certain histories and to assume the primacy of the dominant culture. Both Spivak and Bhabha, for instance, assume

the existence of colonial discourse, but feel compelled to prove the *possibility* of counter-discourse. Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak, but never asks if the elite can speak--overlooking the fact the elite are also a product of history and culture. Bhabha argues that colonial discourse is not hegemonic, but he seems to assume that resistance is only a product of the dominant group's ambivalence. In both cases, colonial discourse is considered to be a priori. Anti-colonial discourse is considered to be solely the afterthought of an already-existing colonial discourse.

This need to prove the possibility of resistance springs from certain theoretical (neo-Marxist) assumptions that are not examined or historicized--such as the belief that *all* subordinated people are *necessarily* interpellated by the dominant discourse, that the native cultures of the subordinated groups are eradicated without a trace by a history of oppression.[24] It is true that the contestatory act is never purely other, never outside the dominant ideology, but it is also true that the counter-cultures are never merely distorted mimicries of the dominant culture. Folk religions are a source of imagination that enables the dispossessed to denaturalize and transform the mythologized claims of the dominant group, but they also bring with them traces of African concepts of community, history, and subjectivity. These elements are not static, but fluid, dynamic practices, ideas, and beliefs that merge with dominant ones. Folk religions, although inflected by the dominant discourse, provide the subordinated group with a

counter-culture of the imagination that enables resistance.[25] Resistance is performed from within the spaces of the dominant ideology, but it is never *merely* an effect of the ambivalence of the dominant discourse. To assume as much would be to overlook the imagination by which the dispossessed can be fueled.[26]

To reiterate the substance of this dissertation, then: the thesis first examines the history of the discourses surrounding the practice of magic from both a dominant Eurocentric and marginalized African-diasporic perspective. Specifically, it investigates seventeenth- and eighteenth- century Eurocentric discourses about West African religions and also antebellum African-diasporic narratives about folk religion. In my first chapter, I filter Spivak's concept of the social construction of native voices and Bhabha's notion about the ambivalence of colonial discourse through an historically-specific example of folk religion. I provide a brief history of the discourses surrounding the practice of magic by examining how the term *fetish* derives from the Portuguese *fetisso* which was developed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestant travelers as a signifier of the irrationality of West Africans. It is not only the dominant group that creates discourses around the practice of folk religion to establish and validate its own power, so too the subordinated group creates meanings to empower itself. I examine how slave cultures in the Caribbean and African America created discourses around folk religion to bolster their own sense of self-esteem, pride, and power. Folk religion is a

practice that has inspired competing groups to inscribe contradictory discourses. A site of discursive battle, it exposes how narratives of the powerful and the powerless are ambivalent, partial, complicitous, and indeterminate.[27]

Having explored a history of folk religions in the Caribbean and African America, the dissertation then traces the literary development of folk religion as resistance from its manifestation in early twentieth-century writing to contemporary women's fiction. How does folk religion enable certain writers of the Caribbean and African America to redefine themselves in relation to received traditions of writing and literature? How does it allow writers to posit a philosophy of history for New World societies? How does the cultural syncreticity of the folk religion enable writers to expose and revise dominant constructions of gender and subjectivity? Placing textual analysis of resistance in context of larger black literary movements such as the Negritude movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts movement, this study argues that there is a cumulative genealogy of folk religion as a generative source for subversive authorship from the 1920's to the present. There are three main instances of folk religion as resistance: folk religion as writing, as history, and as gender. The manifestations of folk religion as a trope build over time to create a textured and multi-faceted modality that culminates in the magical writing of contemporary women writers. The syncretic nature of folk religion, its history of resistance, and its embodiment of postcolonial principles of resistance enable me to

examine the contestatory act in black literature--how writers have defined their cultural origins, and conceptualized the relationship of Africa to the New World diasporic cultures. I argue that the representation of folk culture and folk religion becomes a site of debate over meaning-making, the construction of blackness, the centrality of African origins, and the influence of European literature and culture.

In my second chapter, I argue that Claude McKay's *A Long Way from Home* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* represent folk religion as a trope for writing. These two writers revise dominant concepts of logocentrism and also black cultural nationalist movements that conceived of black creativity in monolithic ways. In the 1920's and 30's, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance attempted to map a hegemonically appropriate subject matter for black literature by dictating the proper form and manner in which to represent folk heritage. McKay's and Hurston's representations of folk religion act as barometers of their reaction to the class biases and political hegemony of the leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance. I argue that Hurston is the first African-American writer to depict folk religion as a trope, and she does so in opposition to the dominant trend of representation in Harlem at the time. She transforms folk religion into an origin for black writing and creativity. Similarly, Claude McKay locates within folk heritage an originary site of black literature. While he does not inscribe folk religion in his autobiography and literature to the same degree as does Hurston, he does use a

secular language of folk religion to depict the creative process of writing.

In my third chapter, I examine how Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* use folk religion to articulate a philosophy of history for the African diaspora. I read their work in context, and as a drastic revision, of the Negritude and Black Arts movements. In the 1940's and 50's, the Negritude movement focussed on folk religion and African-based cultures as the sites of an essential African presence. In the 1960's, the Black Arts movement turned to black folk music to articulate a monolithic concept of blackness and an internally coherent black society. The failure of Negritude and the Black Arts movements lay in their desire to locate an essentialist sense of blackness. In contrast to the ahistoricism that pervaded these traditional concepts of black creativity, community, and origins, Harris and Johnson conceive of folk religion as a paradigm for the fluid and dynamic nature of culture. They locate in folk religion plural cultural elements that testify to the living nature of history as process, not as static product. They use folk religion to represent the processes that map the space of the nation and the history of the black peoples. That is, they use folk religion to reveal how the nation is constructed by numerous histories, both subordinate and dominant.

In my fourth chapter, I explore how Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* represent folk religion as a trope of subjectivity--and, in particular, of black female

subjectivity. Through their representations of folk religion, these writers challenge the patriarchy of cultural nationalist movements that conceived of the roles of women solely in terms of helpmeet and secretary. Recording folk religion as a cultural practice, they explode the stereotype of black woman as dehumanized victim and validate the power of the black female ancestor as a central part of the development of the community and the transmission of culture. They remember the power of the female ancestor who is both conjurer and who is literary foremother. Playing with the syncreticism, cultural plurality, and narrative multiplicity of folk religion, Brodber and Morrison expose the ways that gender is a construct of various social discourses. But they also use folk religion to examine how black women redefine the intersections of gender and race in order to create a space for themselves in the nation. That is, they use folk religion as a trope for subjectivity and gender in order to reimagine the black woman as a subject 'in relation to' history and community, rather than in opposition to others and tradition.

Notes to Introduction

[1]Conjure is a term that I use throughout the dissertation to designate, in general and cross-cultural terms, the magico-religious practices of Caribbean and African-American folk religions.

[2]Later John admonishes Julius while thoroughly enjoying his stories, "Julius . . . your people will never rise in the world until they throw off these childish superstitions and learn to live by the light of reason and common sense" (83).

[3]See Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*.

[4]In defense of one story, Julius points to the existence of a grave as proof: "It's des ez true ez I'm a-settin' here, miss. Dey's a easy way ter prove it: I kin lead de way right ter Henry's grave ober yander in de plantation buryin'-groun'" (43). Julius's method of proof in fact proves nothing at all, for the grave can belong to anyone. But his argument does expose the tentative nature of objective evidence of veracity. Not all arguments which claim to have empirical proof are incontrovertible or absolutely true: evidence can be manipulated to create an illusion, or evidence can sometimes be misleading.

[5]I use the term folk religion to designate a wide variety of practices, as I explain further in chapter one. There are many differences between American and Caribbean varieties of folk religions, such as Hoodoo, Vodun, Myal, Obeah, Revival, and Rastafarianism, which I shall explore in the next chapter. According to my definition, folk religions are comprised of magical practices, which are based on concepts about the connections between divine and mundane worlds, and which are derived from sacred albeit often noncentralized world views.

[6]Cited in *Charles Waddel Chesnutt, Pioneer of the Color Line*, 15.

[7]As Morrison says, "We don't live in places where we can hear those stories anymore; parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological archetypal stories that we heard long ago. But new information has to get out there, and there are several ways to do it. One is the novel" ("Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" 340). It is important that African-American novelists take from the past what is useful in order to create "literature for the village" ("Rootedness" 389).

[8]Through folk religion, hooks creates an alternative sense of subjectivity that both depends upon and yet diverges from poststructuralist challenges to the concept of the Cartesian ego. Poststructuralist theorists have argued that there is no universal subject, no central self who just "happens" to be white, male, and propertied. Emile Benveniste and Roland Barthes, for instance, have pointed to the ambiguous, historical nature of the subject created by time and space. Benveniste asks, "What then is the reality to which *I* or *you* refers? It is solely a 'reality of discourses,' and this is a very strange

thing. *I* cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution,' not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. *I* signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*" (*Problems in General Linguistics* 218). Similarly, Barthes states that "*I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*" ("The Death of the Author" 145). Unlike the European theorists who emphasize the decentered subject, however, hooks does not simply emphasize the disintegration of subjectivity, but rather she affirms the wholeness of black subjectivity.

[9]Referring to her novel *Song of Solomon*, Morrison tells us that she blends "the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world" ("Rootedness" 342). She emphasizes, "We [black people] are very practical, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together was enhancing and not limiting" ("Rootedness" 342).

[10]McKay's *A Long Way From Home* and Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* are the two texts which do not explore the imaginative potential of the supernatural to the same extent as do the other texts I examine in this dissertation, thus posing an exception to my choice of texts that play with the supernatural. On the other hand, as autobiographies which imaginatively locate the potential for writing in a folk heritage, they are particularly useful to examine how magic is associated with creative origins and writing itself.

[11]More than any other chapter, this final one provided a series of possible texts that I could choose between and indeed was hard pressed to do so. For instance, Walker's *Meridian*, Morrison's *Beloved*, Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, and Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* all could have provided readings about the role of magical folk practices. I admit to choosing, in the end, texts that I felt particularly inspired by and passionate about. In particular, I chose to write about *Song of Solomon* over *Beloved* because the magic in *Beloved* appeared to be everywhere and nowhere at once--a fact which is interesting in itself, but perhaps deserving of a much longer and more focussed study than merely one section in a larger chapter.

[12]For a discussion of the problems suggested by the rubric 'Caribbean literature,' see Silvio Torres-Saillant's "The Cross-Cultural Unity of Caribbean Literature: Toward a Centripetal Vision."

[13]In "Southern Exposures: The Urban Experience and the Re-Construction of Black Folk Culture and Community in the Works of Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston," Gunter H. Lenz examines the representation of folk culture in literature. A useful and subtle analysis of folk culture and religion, Lenz's article undertakes a comparative literary analysis of the representations of folk heritage in Wright and Hurston. He does

not focus specifically on folk religion; nor does he examine it as a postcolonial frame through which to read and theorize resistance in the diaspora.

[14]According to Baker, "*Conjure* is, to borrow a title adopted for his nationalist work by Amiri Baraka, the *Spirit House* of black women's creativity (99). The irony of adopting the term from Baraka compounds the many problems inherent in Baker's suggestion that conjure is essentially a function of black women's creativity. Baker derives his notion of black women's magical creativity from Hurston's androcentric notion of a woman's power situated in her genital reproductive capabilities (see *Tell My Horse*). For a lucid analysis of the way Hurston herself revises this problematic association of women, magic, and essentialized sexuality, see Pamela Glenn Menke's "'The Lips of Books': Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*."

[15]Jamaican and Guyanese literature can be studied under the rubric of postcolonial studies because of Jamaica's and Guyana's history of colonization under England; the literature from African America can be considered under this rubric insofar as black America provides an internal paradigm of the postcolonial power dynamics between race relations.

[16]Hayden White refers to critical theory as imperialistic in *Tropics of Discourse*. He writes, "[t]he contours of criticism are unclear, its geography unspecified, and its topography therefore uncertain. As a form of intellectual practice, no field is more imperialistic" (281).

[17]McClintock quotes Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds, *The Empire Writes Back*, 24.

[18]Christian claims that theory has become a "monolithic, monotheistic" and "elite" industry which is counterproductive to black women's and other Third World criticism. She writes about such theorists: "because those who have effected the takeover have the power (although they deny it) first of all to be published, and thereby to determine the ideas which are deemed valuable, some of our most daring and potentially radical critics (and by our I mean black, women, Third World) have been influenced, even co-opted into speaking a language and defining their discussion in terms alien to and opposed to our needs and orientation" (349). I share Christian's distaste for theory's "linguistic jargon, its emphasis on quoting its prophets, . . . its refusal even to mention specific works of creative writers, far less contemporary ones, its preoccupations with mechanical analyses of language, graphs, algebraic equations, its gross generalizations about culture" (350). But while Christian may have some interesting ideas, she takes some of her criticism too far in claiming that theory is "prescriptive" and has no "relationship to practice," that theory does not enable us to "remain open to the intricacies of intersections of language, class, race, and gender in literature" (350). Michael Awkward, in a rebuttal to Christian's article, argues that her attack on theory refuses to acknowledge its "employment by several clearly Afro-centric critics [which] has indeed deepened our received

knowledge of the textual production of black writers." Naming such prominent scholars as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Hortense Spillers, Houston A. Baker, and Mary Helen Washington, Awkward makes the argument that, despite its white androcentric origins, theory can and has been used to explicate African-American "texts and intertexts" (366). Literary theory, he states, is a tool of analysis like any other which enables the study of the ideological process within textual and linguistic production. See Michael Awkward, "Appropriative Gestures: Theory and Afro-American Literary Criticism."

[19]Slemon quotes Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim At Home* 259.

[20]Bhabha's concept of ambivalence is significant for it enables the possibility of resistance. Although the colonial discourse aspires to hegemony, the polarities and contradictions within it threaten the "subject's desire for a pure origin" ("The Other Question" 75). That is, the desire for singular origins is "threatened by the differences of race, colour, and culture" ("The Other Question" 75). Using his concept of the ambivalence of colonial discourse, Bhabha argues that resistance is not instigated from outside, but rather from inside the parameters of colonial authority. In "Signs Taken For Wonders," he writes that resistance is not necessarily "an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture" (110).

[21]According to Freud, the male child develops a fear of castration after recognizing that his mother lacks a penis. He disavows this fearful reality by fixing upon a material object--such as a shoe or foot--as the missing sexual organ. *Fetishism* disavows sexual difference by fixating on an object that masks difference and restores original plenitude. In Freud's lexicon, archaic wholeness is expressed by the statement, "All men have penises"; the anxiety expressed over lack and difference is articulated by, "Some men do not have penises." In Bhabha's vocabulary, the desire for wholeness is articulated by the statement, "All men have the same skin/race/culture"; the anxiety over lack and difference is expressed by, "Some do not have the same skin/race/culture" ("The Other Question" 74).

[22]Robert Young first drew my attention to this point. Whereas he makes a passing reference in one sentence in *White Mythologies*, I have focused on it and explored its resonances and meanings. In chapter 1, I examine the history of the term *fetish* in order to exemplify the ways in which power creates its own terms and discourses.

[23]As Robert Young points out in his summary and analysis of Bhabha's work, "Bhabha claims to describe the condition of colonial discourse--'mimicry is . . . ,' 'hybridity is . . . ,'--seem always offered as static concepts, curiously anthropomorphized so that they possess their own desire, with no reference to the historical provenance" (146).

[24]In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James C. Scott criticizes neo-Marxist theories about false consciousness that

attempt to make sense of the dynamics of oppression and resistance. As Scott puts it, "[m]uch of the debate about power and ideology for three decades or more has centered on how to interpret conforming behaviour by the less powerful (for example, ordinary citizens, the working class, peasants) when there is no apparent use of coercion (for example, violence, threats) to explain the conformity" (70-1). In Europe and England, the arguments have been conducted in largely neo-Marxist terms (71). Why does a subordinate class seem to accept an unfair economic system? Neo-Marxists answer this question by reference to a dominant ideology that "operates to conceal or misrepresent aspects of social relations that, if apprehended directly, would be damaging to the interests of dominant elite" (71). That is, neo-Marxists posit a theory of false consciousness--of which there are two types, thick and thin. Scott argues that the "thick version claims that a dominant ideology works its magic by persuading subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination" (72). Basing his conclusions on the research of Abercrombie's, Hill's, and Turner's *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, Scott claims that there is enough evidence to prove that the thick version is untenable. The thin theory, on the other hand, "maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable" (72). While Scott contends that this second theory is plausible, he later goes on to qualify it severely. Moreover, he then goes on to argue against a third theory of power relations, proposed by John Gaventa, that applies to situations where violent means of coercion are applied to the subordinate group--one which might apply to Caribbean and American slavery (and indeed which has been: in the form of Orlando Patterson's theory about social death in *Slavery and Social Death*). Says Scott about Gaventa's theory: he "proposes a third level of power relations" which depends first upon the "open exercise of coercion and influence," and secondly upon "intimidation and what Gaventa calls 'the rule of anticipated reactions'"(73). Here "there is no change in values or grievances presumably, but rather an estimate of hopeless odds that discourage a challenge" (73). Scott qualifies these three theories of power relations. He contends that

> there is some rather compelling evidence that subordinate classes under feudalism, early capitalism, and late capitalism have not been ideologically incorporated to anything like the extent claimed by the theory. Second, and far more damaging, there is no warrant for supposing that the acceptance of a broad, idealized version of the reigning ideology prevents conflict--even violent conflict--and some evidence that such acceptance may in fact provoke conflict. (74)

Pointing out that the theories of false consciousness make it difficult to explain how "social change could ever originate from below," Scott goes on to ask "[h]ow is it that subordinate groups . . . have so often believed and acted as if their

situations were not inevitable when a more judicious historical reading would have concluded that it was?" (79). As Scott puts it so compellingly,

> [i]t is not the miasma of power and thralldom that requires explanation. We require instead an understanding of a *misreading* by subordinate groups that seems to exaggerate their own power, the possibilities for emancipation, and to underestimate the power arrayed against them. If the elite-dominated public transcript tends to naturalize domination, it would seem that the some countervailing influence manages often to denaturalize domination. (79)

In particular, Scott focuses on the role of the imagination and the community in the act of denaturalizing domination.

[25]Scott makes this point in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* 79.

[26]Folk religion certainly is one possible way through which slaves have been able to denaturalize domination. As Scott argues, "[l]et us instead assume that the inevitability of domination for a slave will have approximately the same status as the inevitability of the weather for the peasant. Concepts of justice and legitimacy are simply irrelevant to something that is inescapably there, like the weather. For that matter, traditional cultivators actually attempt to denaturalize even the weather by personifying it and developing a ritual repertoire designed to influence or control its course" (79).

[27]I use the word traditional despite the fact that it is a problematic one which suggests static religious practices. In West Africa numerous religions such as Christianity and Islam are practiced, and not just religions of loa reverence.

Chapter 1:

A Theory and History of Magico-Religious Practices

In this chapter, I examine the practices of magic from the point of the view of both the oppressor and the oppressed, the center and the margin, Europe and the African diaspora, not to entrench these binaries but rather to problematize them--to emphasize that such binaries lead to a false concept of the hegemony of the oppressor's power and the monolithic lack thereof in the oppressed. Even under the auspices of slavery, where the dominant group appears to have full control over economic resources, human rights, and political power, the subordinated group is never hegemonically dehumanized, never completely without recourse to self-confidence and rebellion. In Caribbean and African-American slave communities, magical folk beliefs and practices have provided the subordinated group with a sense of power. But while Caribbean and African-American slaves have wanted to argue that magical practices stem from native African abilities, comparative cultural studies reveal that Caribbean and African-American magical folk practices derive from a composite of sources--from African religions, European magical practices, and Christianity. Furthermore, comparative studies show that magical practices have inspired competing, contradictory, opposing discourses--not only liberatory ones, but also oppressive ones. In medieval Europe, for example, the dominant group created discourses surrounding

the European practice of magic that ultimately resulted in the witchhunts. Medieval European beliefs about the practices of magic evolved and developed to such a degree that they helped to shape colonialist assumptions about African peoples and religions and, later, about Caribbean and African-American slaves and their belief systems. My study focuses on the discourses surrounding the practice of magic from Eurocentric, Caribbean, and African-American perspectives that expose the ambiguities of meanings created by both elite and subordinated groups in order to justify their own senses of power. Attitudes towards African-inspired magical practices become in this study a point of overlap or contention between colonizers and colonized, a place of intersection that reveals the complexities of ambivalent meaning-making systems in relation to power.

Throughout the dissertation I refer to the rubric "folk religion" to designate a broad range of practices and beliefs in the Caribbean and African America. My choice of the term is influenced by scholars of religion such as Lawrence Levine, Albert Raboteau, and Eugene Genovese, who use it to refer to American and Caribbean practices such as Vodun, Myal, Obeah, Revival, and Hoodoo. Arguing that "the sacred world of the slaves was not confined to Christianity," Lawrence Levine points out that there "existed as well a network of beliefs and practices independent of and yet strongly related to the slaves' formal religion" (55). Many slaves "would have had some difficulty disentangling the web that bound their formal creed and their folk religion into an intelligible whole" (55). The

attempt to disentangle the interconnections has confused scholars as well, claims Levine. Western observers' attempt to separate religion from superstition, a tendency which, as Levine states, is "imprecise and ethnocentric" at best, considering that "one man's religion is another man's superstition" (55). Levine writes,

> It is important to understand that, in the cultures from which the slaves came, phenomena and activities that we might be tempted to dismiss as 'superstitious' were legitimate and important modes of comprehending and operating within a universe perceived of in sacred terms. To distinguish these activities and beliefs from religion is a meaningless exercise. (56)

To understand how divination, magical practices, and healing can be elements of a sacred world view, one needs to understand how West and Central African religions, from which New World magical practices often derive, shape diverse aspects of existence. Caribbean and African-American slaves originated from various regions and cultures in Western and Central Africa, and it would be a mistake not to recognize the many differences between the peoples and cultures. Albert Raboteau points out, however, that there were enough Pan-African cultural and religious similarities to enable New World slaves to find common ground and experiences to create New World folk religions. He writes,

> Widely shared by diverse West African societies were several fundamental beliefs concerning the relationship of

> the divine to the human; belief in a transcendent, benevolent God, creator and ultimate source of providence; belief in a number of immanent gods, to whom people must sacrifice in order to make life propitious; belief in the power of spirits animating things in nature to affect the welfare of people; belief in priests and others who were expert in practical knowledge of the gods and spirits; belief in spirit possession, in which gods, through their devotees, spoke to men. (11)

Raboteau is careful to emphasize the differences between African religions. He writes, "[c]ertainly not every West African society shared all these beliefs and some societies emphasized different ones more than others. The Yoruba and the Fon, for example, developed a much more highly articulated pantheon than did the Ibo, the Efik, or the Bakongo" (12). Nevertheless, he points out, "the outline, in most of its parts, holds as a description of the theological perspective of a wide range of West African peoples" (12).

This outline helps us to see how magico-religious practices comprise sacred world views. As Raboteau writes, "the religious background of the slaves was a complex system of belief, and in the life of an African community there was a close relationship between the natural and the supernatural, the secular and the sacred" (15). This complex series of beliefs and practices resulted in a mutually and often minutely interlocking system of two worlds, divine and mundane. Religion was not a

closed body of beliefs that could be separated off from everyday life.[1]

The fluid and non-centralized relationship between the supernatural and the natural, the sacred and the secular can be illuminated further by Emile Durkheim's exploration and definition of folk religion as a conceptual category for human behaviour. In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim approaches religion in much the same fashion as did Enlightenment philosophers--that is, he turns to so-called "primitive" religions in order to find a model for human behaviour and belief systems (203). By focussing mostly on Australian and Native American cultures, he finds what he considers to be the most basic or simple of religious systems, and thereby claims to uncover the underlying principles of human nature. The categories "primitive" and "simple" clearly are problematic ones. Nevertheless, Durkheim provides insights about the concept of folk religion and its relationship to magical practices. Placing his findings in relation to and against the work of Frazer, Boas, and Tylor, Durkheim maps out the connections between magic practices and religious belief. He writes that

> magic is not, as Frazer has held, an original fact, of which religion is only a derived form. Quite the contrary, it was under the influence of religious ideas that the precepts upon which the art of the magician is based were established, and it was only through a secondary extension that they were applied to purely lay relations. (404)

He points out that the "faith inspired by magic is only a particular case of religious faith in general" (405). Magic is "full of religious elements" because "it was born of religion" (405). In light of Durkheim's definition, I argue that magical practices are based in sacred world views. True, magical practices are not always part of systematic belief systems. Hoodoo, for example, which developed in the American South (and which is to be distinguished from Vodun in Louisiana), retained the practice of magic, divination, and healing, but did not maintain African beliefs in the pantheon of loas or spirits. And yet, the magical folk practices associated with Hoodoo are embedded in a cosmology that seeks to explain the world in accordance with sacred world views (as I shall explain later in the chapter), and thus comprise what I consider to be folk religion.

From the perspective of the dominant group in Europe, the discourses surrounding the practice of magic were based on a structural logic that divided self from other, spirit from body, men from women, and ultimately European from African. I examine one manifestation of these discourses surrounding the African magical practices in the example of the *fetish*, a term which has infiltrated Western language and consciousness as a signifier of negative value judgment (with different meanings attributed to it by theorists). As a concept, the *fetish* has been redefined by Marxist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial theorists. But while the *fetish* evinces a certain unquestioned currency in

theoretical circles, it is a term that proves to have a particularly fraught and complex genesis--one that is pertinent to this study, considering my postcolonial approach to the study of power relations. As I argued in the introduction, postcolonial theorists use the concept of the *fetish* to explicate power dynamics in a colonial context, but they do not trace it historically to its construction in African colonial contexts. All words and languages are created, but the *fetish* is a term that embodies in a particular way the historical constructedness of signification. As William Pietz points out, the *fetish* does not belong to any actual historical practice per se, rather it is a misinterpretation of West African religious practices and is born in the intersection of cross-cultural currents (Pietz I). Not only does the concept fail to take into consideration the many cultural and religious differences between the Yoruba, Akan, and Dahomey, it misrepresents the fundamental nature of West African religious practices altogether.[2] Nonetheless, the *fetish* maintains a certain conceptual currency that furthered the development of colonial attitudes towards race and otherness. Following Pietz's work, I briefly trace in the first half of this chapter the term *fetish* to its genesis in Christian notions of idolatry, map its usage in Protestant travel narratives about West Africa, and then touch upon its role in Enlightenment philosophers' theories about European superiority and African inferiority.

Although there are no absolute origins, the history of term *fetish* can be traced back to sixteenth- and seventeenth-

century European Protestant narratives of travel to West Africa, and before that to Christian logocentric notions of idolatry. Imported by the Portuguese to West Africa in the 15th century, the *feitico* was a Portuguese word that referred to the practice of witchcraft--that is, it was a term that derived from Christian theological notions about idolatry and the worship of false gods.[3] A striking phenomenon of the Middle Ages was the ambiguous status of magical practices that were common to numerous classes. Christian theology demonized magic as witchcraft, but the reality of ritual magic proved to be more amorphous than the theology of the time would attempt to render it. Prevalent in Europe since antiquity, magic derived from the classical culture of the ancient Graeco-Roman world as well as the cultures of the Germanic and Celtic peoples. In medieval Europe, magic was practiced among all classes and across such fields as divination, healing, sorcery, protection, alchemy, and astrology. As historian Richard Kieckhefer writes, when "we look at the people who were in fact using varieties of magic in medieval Europe," instead "of finding a single readily identifiable class of magicians we find various types of people involved in diverse magical activities: monks, parish priests, physicians, surgeon-barbers, midwives, folk healers and diviners with no formal training" (*Magic in the Middle Ages* 56). Magic, in other words, was a tradition that was neither institutionalized nor the speciality of a single class of people. It was, rather, a common tradition that developed idiosyncratically. Although monks were more likely to write down

their magical ritual, magic was practiced by all classes of people, by the educated and uneducated, by the monied and poor, by the court and by the peasants.[4]

Although little clear-cut consensus in Europe about which magical practices constituted idolatry existed, practices such as the alteration of material reality and the invocation of demons were by and large considered to be heretical. The Church considered the willful alteration of material reality for non-sanctified purposes sinful, since Christian theology divided spirit from body and deemed the latter an improper realm of worship. Only the Church could sanctify material as a vehicle of faith and divine power and render it appropriate for legitimate worship. While the ritual practice of magic differed from the practice of demonology, the two had in common the focus on material reality as a site of power, a factor that led to an increased interest in stamping out the practice of magic. Slowly, magic became associated with demonology. Demonology involved the magical invocation of demons through the manipulation of material objects such as rings, staffs, animals, rituals often accompanied by the pronouncement of divine names and sacred words. Whether conjuring magic for good or for evil, magicians did not act under the assumption that they worshipped demons, but rather under the presumption that they controlled these demons for their own purposes.[5] Since Christian monotheism allowed for the existence of one god, these spirits, who existed in excess of God, were false gods or demons. To worship any god other than the Christian one was considered to be idolatrous.

Augustine writes that no credence should be given to the opinion of philosophers who believe that demons "act as messengers or interpreters between the gods and men to carry our petitions from us to the gods and to bring back to us the help of the gods (338). These demons, who facilitate magic, necessarily are "spirits most eager to inflict harm, utterly alien from righteousness, swollen with pride, pale with envy, subtle in deceit (338). Augustine distinguished between miracles, which were wrought for the purpose of commending God, and magic, which is composed of "incantations and charms composed under the influence of a criminal tampering with the unseen world" (394); thus magicians were "slaves of the deceitful rites of the demons whom they invoke under the names of angels" (394). Magicians, in other words, might believe that they controlled the spirits, but they were in reality deceived.

When the Portuguese first landed on the coast of Senegal in 1436, they brought with them the term *feitico* which referred to the practice of witchcraft and idolatry. The term was soon transformed into a new concept *fetisso* in the journals of Protestant travellers in the seventeenth century. While the *feitico* generally indicated the worship of false gods or idolatry, the *fetisso* came to mean something different--the worship of the material thing itself.[6] The *fetisso* was not thought to be an allegorical image or metaphor, but rather the literal object of worship. West Africans were deemed incapable of true thinking and unable to perceive God; instead they

worshipped trees, sticks, animals, stones. Whereas medieval thinkers considered the practice of magic to be sinful because it propagated immorality through the worship of false gods, the precursors of the Enlightenment denounced *fetisso* or *fetish* worship because it was a form of false logic or irrationality. The shift in terms signalled a shift from the evil of heresy to the evil of irrationality; the Europeans had moved from a critique of magic as demonic invocation to a critique of magic as foolishness.[7]

The concept of the *fetisso* as proof of the inferiority of a people is apparent in numerous travel narratives, the most popular being Willem Bosman's *A New and Accurate Account of the Coast of Guinea* (1703). Bosman was chief merchant for the Dutch West Indies Company in 1698. When his superior was ousted, Bosman found himself in Holland, his career over at the age of 29, and he wrote one of the most popular travel narratives ever published. His text was used by subsequent thinkers and travellers as the authoritative account of African religious practices, and it is from his travel narrative that the notion of the *fetisso* was popularized by Enlightenment thinkers who used it to define irrationality. Bosman was struck by the inability of Africans to reason. He writes,

> A'most all the Coast *Negroes* believe in one true God, to whom they attribute the Creation of the World and all things in it, though in a crude indigested Manner, they not being able to form a just idea of a Deity. They are not obliged to themselves nor the Tradition of their

> Ancestors for their Opinion, rude as it is, but to their daily Conversation with the *Europeans*, who from time to time have continually endeavoured to emplant this notion in them.[8] (146)

In the above passage, Bosman construes the *fetisso* or *fetish* as an obstacle to a "just" understanding of god. He begrudgingly admits that West Africans might have a crude understanding of God, but surmises that this understanding comes from outside European influence and teachings, not from any intrinsic reason or correct religious awareness they might have. As well, Pieter de Marees, who first introduced the term *fetisso* to Northern Europe in his 1602 *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, uses similar reasoning. He makes a valiant attempt not to criticize too absolutely the religious and cultural practices he sees, but his language is littered with adjectives from the cultural judgment of his day, such as "childish," "foolish," 'frivolity," "folly," "nonsense," "madness," and "Monkey-buffoonery" (66-74). Considering *fetissos* to be irrational and foolish, Marees believed them to be symptomatic of a primitive people who could not yet reason properly.

The practice of *fetish* worship came to be considered not only as a symptom of irrationality, but also of social corruption. Since Africans pray to *fetishes* and never to God, Bosman imagined the *fetish* to be the basis and even the cause of primitivism. Bosman believed that *fetishism* was nothing more than self-interest disguised as worship. Scandalous corruption

could be traced to the *fetish* priests: "[t]he Priests, who are generally sly and crafty, encouraged by the stupid Credulity of the People, have all the opportunity in the World to impose the grossest absurdities and fleece their purses; as they indeed do effectually" (Bosman 1967, 152). Bosman was not the only one who noted the so-called "craftiness" of the *fetish* priests. In 1732, French merchant John Barbot commented that "the simplicity of those deluded people, shews the subtilty and craftiness of their preists, who can so far blind them that they may not discover their palpable frauds, and keep them in an absolute submission to themselves upon all occasions, so to gratify their insatiable avarice or vanity, and lord it over them as well in civil as in religious affairs" (1732: 308). Interestingly, Bosman and Barbot see no contradiction in assuming the simplicity and stupid credulity in masses of people on the one hand, and the sophisticated corruption and craftiness of *fetish* priests on the other.

The travel narratives reduced the practice of *fetish* worship to the lowest common denominator and associated *fetissos* with filth and trash.[9] Bosman writes, "Each Priest of *Feticheer* hath his peculiar Idol, prepared and adjusted in a particular and different manner, but most of them like the following Description. They have a great Wooden Pipe filled with Earth, Oil, Blood, the Bones of dead Men and Beasts, Feathers, Hair; and to be short, all sorts of Excrementitious and filthy Trash, which they do not endeavor to mold into any Shape, but lay it in a confused heap in the Pipe" (130). The *fetish* is associated

with contamination. Without shape or form, *fetish* worship acts as a threat to order, as a source of confusion and infection. Nicolas Villault also associates *fetishes* with filth and contamination. He writes of the people of the Gold Coast: "they have superstitions which surpass all belief, although the better part of these Fetiches are inanimate things, and most often so filthy and vile that one would not wish to touch them. They all have some which they carry on them, certain ones are small ends of horns filled with ordure, other ones are little figures, animal heads, and a hundred other infamies which their priests sell them, saying they found them under the *fetish* tree" (1669, 261).[10] According to Villault, the question of contamination is telling: he separates the civilized we from the disordered they. What the civilized self would not touch, the primitive other does not hesitate to touch continually--and indeed carries on his or her person as a matter of course.

The European travellers generally believed that West and Central African religion and society were based on arbitrary and frivolous associations, rather than on any rigorous mental approach to the discovery of truth. The *fetissos* were thought to be anything that the Africans thought was novel or impressive. Thus William Smith writes in 1744 in *A New Voyage to Guinea* that a *fetish* is grounded in fancy, not in a serious religious faith or belief system:

> The most troublesome sect are the *Pagans*, who trouble themselves about no Religion at all; yet every one of them have some Trifle or other, to which they pay a particular

> Respect, or Kind of Adoration, believing it can defend them from all Danger's: Some have a Lion's Tail, some a Bird's Feather, some a Pebble, a Bit of Rag, a Dog's Leg; or, in short, any Thing they fancy: And this they call their FITTISH, which Word not only signifies the Thing worshipped, but sometimes a *Spell*, *Charm*, or *Inchantment*. To take *Fittish*, is, to take an Oath; which Ceremony is variously perform'd in several Parts of Guinea. (26-27)

Smith makes the point that West African religions are based on an arbitrary and capricious framework of belief--not on any true or logical understanding of God or nature. Moreover, he also makes a connection between trouble and religious beliefs: the West Africans are "troublesome" because they worship their *fetissos*. His argument follows the logic that *fetish* worship is equivalent to stepping out of place, to transgression.[11] The word troublesome does not suggest evil or dangerous behavior, but rather something annoying, slight, trifling, and irritating.[12] Smith makes this point numerous times, and he works to undercut West African religion by choosing absurd examples to show that Africans have no sense of true religion: he states later in his travel narrative that "the *Negroes* have chose *Woods, Lakes, Hills* or a parte of these, *a bundle of Chips, or Roots, a Stone, a piece of Metal*, or the like for their *Fetishes*" (83).

With time, the presumed inferiority of West African traditional religions became a contrapunctual theme for the superiority of modern European reason.[13] These travel narratives

were used as intellectual fodder for the European study of religion as a measurement of human nature. The focus on religion as a barometer of human nature was a novel idea instigated in the seventeenth century, and the practices of West African religions were used, not surprisingly, as a negative marker against which Enlightenment Europe could measure its superiority. Theorists such as Pierre Bayles, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, David Hume, and Charles de Brosses studied human nature by examining the origins and psychology of religious worship.[14]

The first to examine Bosman's theories was Pierre Bayle, who turned Bosman's passing comments into a theory about human nature. Bayle compared West African religions with Graeco-Roman practices in *Response Aux Questions d'un Provincial* (1704) to create a theory about the irrationality of the primitive mind. For Bayle, there existed a timeless divide between the primitive and educated mind, one that could not be breached. For him, so-called pagan religions were free of allegorism. They revealed not only irrationality but also weakness and malice. Because Bayle did not ascribe to a theory of evolution, he saw idolatry as a sign not of intellectual immaturity (which could be overcome with time) but of vulgarity and stupidity. Numerous other philosophers like Fontenelle and Hume focussed on idolatrous worship to create a theory of human development. It was in Charles de Brosses' 1760 *Du Culte Des Dieux Fetishes* that the theory of *fetishism* reached its culmination as an orientalizing discourse. Lifting passages wholesale from Hume's

Natural History of Religion, de Brosses (like Hume) questioned the impetus of human beings to invent and worship gods. According to de Brosses, *fetishism* was born out of fear and madness; it was a symptom of feeble reasoning powers revealed by a people still in the early stages of their development. Like Bayle, he used Bosman's travel narratives to create an analogy between ancient and modern. But de Brosses's theory of *fetishism* was a profoundly optimistic one which conceived of primitiveness as an evolutionary stage that all peoples must pass through (some at different rates than others). For Bayle, Enlightenment reason was the highest stage of human development.[15]

The history of the *fetish*, then, shows how West African religious practices were marginalized by Eurocentric discourses about the primacy of self over other. The African-inspired practices of magic prove to inhabit the center of colonizing discourses that have lead to denigrations of race and culture. The history of the *fetish* shows how Africans were associated with a range of meanings from vulgar to foolish, from childish to malicious. *Fetishism* is one example of a concept around which a dominant group has created a discourse of otherness, an orientalizing discourse that marginalizes black culture. West African and African diasporic religious practices involving magic and ancestor veneration have been belittled by Western discourse as sexualized, racialized, sinister, and irrational.[16] The languages surrounding these practices of magic comprise what Toni Morrison calls Africanist discourse, which denotes a prejudiced ideology imposed upon and directed to "other" races,

cultures, and peoples who do not inhabit the colonial center or side with the dominant perspective (*Playing in the Dark* 6). By "Africanism," Morrison does not mean the actual discourse which articulates the complexities of African religion, custom, and society. Rather than the body of knowledge on Africa that the philosopher Valentine Mudimbe means by the term 'Africanism,' Morrison uses the term in approximately the same way that Edward Said uses the term "Orientalism": as a term for the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (6-7).

In the New World, the languages surrounding the practices of African-influenced magic continued to inspire colonizing discourses about self and other. Subordinated groups, however, interpreted the practice of magic in very different ways: as a sign of African power, superiority, and skill.[17] In New World societies in the Caribbean and African America, folk religions such as Myal, Obeah, Revival, Vodun, and Hoodoo provided a way to make sense of the world. Based on the notion that events had causes that could be divined, understood, and effected by humans, folk religions provided a cosmology that enabled subordinated peoples to retain belief in their own power. In antebellum societies, folk religions provided the slaves the strength and faith to stand up for themselves and to create a community-based culture and imaginative resource. Sometimes,

folk religions could lead to outright rebellion and conspiracy, such as the 1792 Saint Dominigue rebellion against the French and the 1822 conspiracy of Denmark Vesey and Gullah Jack against the master class in Charleston.

Folk religions took on different manifestations in various regions. Numerous of folk religions such as Myal, Obeah, Revivalism, and Rastafarianism developed in Jamaica. Monica Schuler argues that Myalism was a religious movement that first originated in the eighteenth century in Jamaica. Myal was patently anti-Obeah.[18] That is, the former was a practice of healing and benevolent magic, whereas the latter consisted of evil and malevolent magic.[19] Myalists believed that all misfortune derived from spirits of the dead and that doctors trained to find and uproot the cause of misfortune could change the balance of power and eradicate the misfortune. This belief system was particularly helpful to the slaves in their attempts to gain a sense of power and agency. Schuler notes that Myal emerged in the 1760's "as a Pan-African religious society to protect slaves against European sorcery" (66). Moreover, as Barry Chevannes points out, Myalism played a role in the Taki Rebellion of 1760; it allowed the rebellion to be based along Pan-African rather than ethnic lines for the first time (*Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* 19).

Following the Taki Rebellion, Myal began to absorb and transform Christian traditions. After the American War of Independence, British Loyalists fled to the Caribbean, bringing with them their slaves and servants. A number of the slaves were

preachers, who introduced the Baptist faith to Jamaica and influenced a large number of people, some of whom were Myalists. Adopting elements of Baptism, Myalists caused their religion to enter into a new syncretic stage (Schuler 68). As Barry Chevannes observes, Myal both incorporated and transformed Christian elements. He points out that Christianity focusses on human beings' relationships with God and emphasizes transmitted knowledge through the Bible and catechism. Myal, on the other hand, focuses on human beings' relationship with the Spirit "as possessor and sought him in dreams and secluded retreat" and places its emphasis on the *experience* of the Spirit (*Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* 19).

Myal underwent yet another dramatic shift in the 1860's during the great religious revival of Protestantism that swept through Jamaica.[20] In 1860, Myal was transformed by the Great Revival into two variants, Zion, which retained a closer resemblance to Christianity, and Pukumina, which remained closer to Myal (Chevannes, *Roots and Ideology* 20). Chevannes, who refers to both these strains as Revival, points out that "Zion made greater use of the Bible and other Christian symbols, but above all refused to show any respect for the belligerent and dangerous spirits that it acknowledged to exist but kept under control through the power of ritual symbolism (Chevannes, *Roots and Ideology* 21). Pukumina, on the hand, which emerged only after Zion did, acknowledges all spirits as powerful and therefore deserving of respect (Chevannes, *Roots and Ideology* 21).

According to Chevannes, Rastafarianism is both an offshoot and transformation of Revival (see Chevannes *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* and *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*; see also Besson and Schuler). Rastafarianism developed in the outskirts of Kingston in the 1930's in conjunction with a number of factors, the main ones being the teachings of Marcus Garvey and the crowning of Haile Selassie as Emperor of Ethiopia. Garvey's Afrocentric belief that God is black and that blacks should return to Africa encouraged certain Jamaicans to recognize Haile Selassie, crowned Ras (prince) Tafari, as Jesus Christ. Rastafaris took Garvey's notion of a black God further, concluding that He was not only black, "but physically living among men" (Chevannes, "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" 11). As Chevannes puts it, Rastafari concluded "that if being Black was a divine attribute, then the African race, by being Black, shared in divinity" (11).

Rastafaris adhere to a number of beliefs: that Rome is the home of the anti-Christ, that God is black, that facial hair is a Godhead, and that everyman is a god and that God is human, for example. Moreover, Rastafarianism is comprised of certain folk beliefs in magical lore, divination, and herbalism. Whereas Rastafaris do not practice spirit possession or believe in polytheism, they do believe in the power of visions, the magical power of the word, and the fact that nature is a divine present from God. Certain magical beliefs are particular to Rastafarianism. Chevannes explains that to "'dance nyabinghi' against an identified oppressor," for example, "was to invoke in

a sure and compelling way the power of God to destroy him" ("New Approach to Rastafari" 34). Another magical belief concerns the power of dreadlocks "to be able to wreak destruction on Babylon" (34). In another example, Joseph Owens explains the Rastafarian belief in reincarnation, "which does not follow on death but occurs in the midst of life, as a regeneration of the exhausted forces" (*Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* 142).

There are three main stages to the development of Rastafarianism, argues Chevannes ("Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" 11). One of the first significant developments included the wearing of facial hair by adult males, "which they sacralized by claiming biblical precepts as well as emulation of the Godhead, Tafari, who was pictured with a full beard" ("Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" 11). The second stage occurred among "second-generation converts who encountered the movement in the 1940's but who were in revolt against practices they thought were compromising" (12). They developed the "hallmarks of the new image of the Rastafari: dreadlocks, ganja-smoking, Rasta talk" (12). As well, they "intensified their practical opposition to the colonial state, using such forms as repatriation activities, illicit street marches, disruption of the court and defiance of the police" (12).[21] Another far-reaching change that occurred during the second stage was the association of Rastafarianism with the development of Reggae music (14). The third and "current" stage of Rastafarianism began in the 1980's and is "the result of an onset of routinization" (15). In this last phase of

Rastafarianism, as Chevannes puts it, "the pervasiveness of Rastafari ideology among the urban youth has waned" (15). There is yet another change that characterizes this third stage, continues Chevannes: it is the increasing role and "vocality" of women in the movement (15).[22]

Schuler, Chevannes, Besson, Owens, and Campbell claim that Rastafarianism is a theological movement that enabled cultural resistance. Not all scholars agree on this point, however. Ken Post, for example, submits the mediated claim that Rastafarianism is an example of Marxist false consciousness, that it contains elements of social protest, but that it ultimately fails to produce effective action ("The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica, 1930-38" 186). Chevannes, on the other hand, argues that Rastafarianism is a revolutionary movement because it preaches a counter-hegemonic doctrine that asserts the dignity of black men, but, more importantly, because it is a movement based on *active* attempts to change society. Chevannes stresses that Rastafarianism is revolutionary, "not just because it consistently preaches a doctrine about a new order, in which every Black man will have his own 'vine and fig leaf', thus reversing the order of Black people at the bottom of society, but because it has in the past (1934, 1956, and the most notable of all, 1959) taken measures to bring about repatriation to Africa" ("New Approach to Rastafari" 22).[23]

Whereas Myal, Revival, and Rastafarianism combined Protestant beliefs with African ones in Jamaica, the folk religion Vodun adopted different religious elements and

traditions in Haiti. With its drumming, dancing, possession, and libations to the gods, Haitian folk religion combined African religious practices with Roman Catholicism. African gods were associated with Catholic saints; the Catholic liturgical calendar replaced African ones (although on feast day of saints, gods were fed with African style sacrifice). Objects such as candles, holy water, and pictures were appropriated for their magical powers.[24] While Vodun merged easily with Christianity, however, the notion of syncreticism should not be taken too far. Religious historian Albert Raboteau argues that the syncreticity of the two religions began after the *Code Noir* was passed in 1685 legislating that all slaves brought to French colonies must receive religious education within eight days of their arrival (23). Initially, the Roman Catholic veneration of the saints provided the slaves with a cover for the worship of African gods. As time went on, Christian saints became associated with African gods, for it was not unusual for African religions to incorporate "foreign" gods of neighbors and enemies. For example, while the Haitians believe in Grand Met (the supreme being), they pray to the lesser gods (the loas). Loas have been associated with saints in accordance to the similarity of their powers: St. Barbara, the protectress against thunder and lightning, is associated with Shango, god of thunder and lightning; St. Peter, keeper of the gate to Heaven, is associated with Papa Legba, god of the crossroads and messenger god.

There were many similarities between the Vodun practiced in the Caribbean and Louisiana. After 1791, slaves from the Caribbean transported to Louisiana brought with them their religious beliefs.[25] Vodun arose from African religions, but it flourished in Louisiana as a result of the influx of freedmen and slaves from Saint Dominigue (as Haiti was once called) during the revolution--much to the dismay of some white officials. In the eighteenth century, many states tried to restrict the flow of slaves and free blacks from the West Indies. Although Louisiana bought slaves from the West Indies starting in 1716, legal statutes later prohibited the sale of slaves from that region. In 1782, the importation of slaves from the Martinique was prohibited due to a fear of the dangers of magical practices. As the governor at the time put it, "these negroes are too much given to voodooism and make the lives of the citizens unsafe" (cited in Raboteau 76). Another ban was imposed in 1792, this time upon the slaves from Saint Dominigue, although some slaves were allowed to enter when their masters were granted asylum at the beginning of the revolution. Not until the United States acquired Louisiana in 1803 did the ban on West Indian slaves lift. Thousands of slaves then emigrated to Louisiana, bringing with them their knowledge and recipes of Vodun magical rituals and power.

In Louisiana, Vodun was influenced by, but was not equivalent to, Haitian folk religion. One difference between Haitian and New Orleans Vodun was the pantheon of loas. In New Orleans, worship centered primarily on a snake god Damballah

which, in Dahomey, was envisioned as a snake and represented the principle of life. While the snake god took center stage in worship and magical rites, there were a few other gods from the Dahomey pantheon that survived--such as Papa Legba. All in all, however, in New Orleans, the panoply of gods was diminished. Another striking development in New Orleans Vodun was its strong female leadership. The most of famous Vodun doctors in New Orleans were the two Marie Laveaus, a mother and daughter who reigned from 1830 to the 1880's. They developed a system of domestic spies to keep them informed of social interactions and secrets. In the 1930's, Zora Neale Hurston underwent initiation into a Vodun cult in New Orleans at the tutelage of a priest named Turner who claimed to have received his own training from Marie Laveau herself.[26]

Hoodoo, in contrast to New Orleans Vodun, is a loosely-based *system* of magic as opposed to an organized religion. In the United States, Hoodoo combined West African religions with Protestantism and, unlike Vodun, did not center around the worship of gods. Albert Raboteau tentatively speculates that the lack of adaptability of Protestantism to African folk religion is perhaps one reason that Hoodoo was not a well-organized religion but rather a system of magic. Playing an influential role in the American South, Protestantism with its emphasis on "biblical preaching, inward conversion, and credible accounts of the signs of grace was not as conducive to syncreticism with African theology and ritual" (Raboteau 88). Raboteau points out that Catholicism, with its emphasis on the veneration of saints,

use of sacramentals, and organization of religious fraternities "offered the slaves a supportive context for the continuity of African religious elements in recognizable form" (88). Nonetheless, Hoodoo did survive. Drumming and dancing, rootwork, divination, and ghost lore remained in the system of magic called Hoodoo, even though the reverence of loas did not. Furthermore, the belief in and practice of spirit possession was also lost. Whereas in Haiti and New Orleans, Vodun devotees could be possessed or "ridden" by a loa, the same was not true of those who practiced Hoodoo in the American South.

Just as early Europeans attempted to outlaw the practice of magic, slave masters attempted to outlaw slave magical practices. Slave religion might be considered an "invisible institution" by today's scholars who either inscribe or refute this rubric, but slave masters were certainly cognizant of the practice of slave religion and evinced numerous responses and attitudes towards it--ranging from scorn to belief to fear. Some slave masters and reverends regarded root work as a dangerous source of rebellion and resistance. In 1842, Reverend Charles C. Jones wrote about slaves:

> On certain occasions they have been made to believe that while they carried about their person some charm with which they had been furnished, they were *invulnerable*. They have, on certain other occasions, been made to believe that they were under a protection that rendered them *invincible*. That they may go any where and do any thing they pleased, and it would be impossible for them to

> be discovered or known; in fine, to will was to do--safely, successfully. They have been known to be so perfectly and fearfully under the influence of some leader or conjurer or minister, that they have not dared to disobey him in the least particular; nor to disclose their own intended or perpetrated crimes, in view of inevitable death itself; notwithstanding all other influences brought to bear upon them. (C.C. Jones, *Religious Instruction* 128; cited in Levine 75)

As Jones shows, the master class was well aware that power could be a product of belief and will: "to will was to do." Slave masters recognized the dangers of conjure and its potential to inspire remarkable feats of bravery and resistance. In Jamaica, for instance, a witchcraft law outlawing the use of magic was passed in 1760 and was renewed again in 1938: "Any Negro or other Slave who shall pretend to any supernatural Power, and be detected in making use of any . . . materials relative to the Practice of Obeah or Witchcraft . . . [u]pon Conviction . . . [shall] suffer Death or Transportation."[27] In the United States, conjure doctors were feared for their knowledge of roots and poisons. At least twenty slaves were executed for poisoning in Virginia between 1772 and 1810. In South Carolina's Negro Act of 1740, the administering of poison by a slave was made a felony. Additional clauses followed in 1751 which attempted to stamp out the use and knowledge of medicinal drugs.[28] These statutes, however, had little effect in controlling the practice of

conjure on the plantations, and conjure continued to flourish despite attempts at suppression.

Not all slave masters were afraid of magical folk practices; others subscribed to an "enlightened" disregard of all that was "primitive." One American writer, who identified himself as a "minister of the gospel," reported to the *Southern Cultivator* that, "in ninety-nine cases out of hundred," the conjure doctor is "the most consummate villain and hypocrite on the premises" and he "*steals* his master's pigs, and is still an object commanding the peculiar regard of Heaven" (cited in Genovese 216).[29] This passage recalls Willem Bosman's opinion of African witchdoctors as sly, crafty charlatans who were solely interested in their own self-advancement. Yet what about the exceptional one case out of hundred? In that case, did certain members of the master group believe that the conjure doctor was not a charlatan? Genovese identifies instances when the white population believed in and came under the influence of black conjure: one "master fell under the power of a conjurer on his plantation," another "sought a conjurer's help in business matters," and yet another slaveholder "enlisted a black conjurer to help murder his wife" (218).[30] These cases were generally rare, however, and slaves most often realized that magic was not effective against the slave master--which led some slaves to abandon their faith in conjure and others to conclude that whites and blacks were subject to different laws of power.

As a system of magic and sacred beliefs, Hoodoo depended on the individual interpretations of its practitioners regarding

ghost lore, witchcraft, fortune-telling, and herbalism.[31] The supernatural played an important role in slave life for it provided a way to explain and control misfortune. Based partly as it was on African (as well as European) beliefs in magic, Hoodoo allowed slaves to believe that misfortune was not a function of chance; life was neither random nor haphazard but predictable and controllable. Illness, for instance, was the result of a magical spell--known as a trick, fix, hand, or mojo. These mojos usually could consist of any number of things, the most common being hair cuttings, nail clippings, graveyard dirt, herbs, reptiles, pins, bottles, flannel and roots. These tricks caused a wide assortment of bodily diseases. Says one ex-slave who blamed his own blindness and his sister's ailments on conjure: "Dey kin fix yuh wid mos anyting. . . . I hab a sistuh name Ida Walker wut wuz fix wid candy. She ate duh candy an den uh ahm swell up an tun blue. Yuh could see lill animals runnin up an down uh ahm" (Georgia Writers' Project, *Drums and Shadows*, 37). Even death and madness could be attributed to conjure. An ex-slave from a community southeast of Savannah reported that "Cose, det is duh will ub God, but dey do say jis duh same wen a pusson die, 'Maybe somebody fix em' aw 'I sho know dat uhmun wuz rooted'" (83). And in regards to the relationship between conjure and sanity, former slave Fred Jones reported that "Wenebuh a pusson go crazy, wut is dat but conjuh?" (27).

Hoodoo provided not only a cosmology which explained misfortune, sickness, and madness, but also a means to cope with and change reality. Although a person was vulnerable to the ill

will of a neighbor working through a conjure doctor, there was no power too strong which could not be counteracted. As Mary Granger, the supervisor of the Georgia Writer's Project, points out, "To this type of Negro there is little talk of 'bad luck.' To him it is 'bad mouth' set against him by an enemy" (Introduction to *Drums and Shadows*). In fact, the term "bad mouth magic" highlights the spoken or constructed nature of magic. In the same way that "bad" has been resignified to be mean "good" in modern black speech, so too can the "bad" be made "good" in the language of conjure. Conjure proves to have a discursive power which can write a language of both good and evil upon the text of a body; it can either cause or prevent events from occurring. Its power, in other words, is morally ambivalent. Whereas one conjure doctor might practice harmful magic against a slave, another conjure doctor can always to be hired to lift or counter the "trick" or "mojo." But the discursivity of conjure was not dependent on the slave's recourse to a conjure doctor. The universe itself provided a system of signs for any slave adept enough to read and interpret them. According to conjure, the world translated itself into a system of signs that provided warning of and control over, misfortune. Emma Monroe, a former slave, reported that "One ting I do blieb in is signs. Ef yuh watch signs, dey alluz mean good aw bad luck tuh yuh. Ef muh lef eye jump, I kin look fuh bad nooz, and ef muh right jump, I kin look fuh good nooz" (18).[32]

Slaves in the American South turned to Hoodoo, then, for a wide range of reasons to gain control over their lives: to cure

illness, guarantee true love or loyalty, prevent a whipping, or provide success in evading the patterrollers during an escape. William Wells Brown, for instance, consulted Uncle Frank, a fortune teller, to buoy his confidence before deciding to escape slavery and seek freedom.[33] He writes, "I am no believer in soothsaying; yet I am sometimes at a loss to know how Uncle Frank could tell so accurately what would occur in the future. Among the many things he told was one which was enough to pay me for all the trouble of hunting him up. It was that *I should be free!*" (215). In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass documents how he turned to the root doctor to avoid being whipped by his slave master, Covey. He consulted Sandy, the old advisor, and was counselled to carry a certain root on his right side. Following this episode, Douglass finds the courage to stand up to his master. The power of the root provides him with strength, courage, and masculinity. He prefaces his account of the fight with a tribute to the power of the root. He writes: "On this morning, the virtue of the *root* was tested" (296). Five sentences following, Douglass writes,

> from whence came the spirit I don't know--I resolved to fight. . . . My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey was all taken aback. He trembled like a leaf. . . . The whole six months afterwards, that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger. . . . This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense

> of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. (297-98)

Douglass might not know from where the spirit came, but the proximity of these two statements makes the connection clear enough. Conjure provided the slaves with unexpected spirit and determination; it enabled the recreation of self as dignified and whole.

African-American Hoodoo was based on a philosophy which preached that, despite what the dominant discourse might dictate, blacks had alternative avenues of power and knowledge. According to white supremacist discourses, African cultures were too weak to withstand their confrontation with European culture and black people were naturally subordinate to whites. According to the slaves' discourses, the opposite was true. African origins and culture provided the slaves with power and strength. A common refrain mentioned by those interviewed by the Georgia Writers' Project concerned the natural, African-born inheritance of magical power. One ex-slave, Christine Nelson, states that "Conjuh is magic some folks is bawn wid" (*Drums*, 19); according to another former slave, Nathaniel John Lewis: "I was birthed with my wisdom because I was the seventh child bawn with a caul" (15); and ex-slave Jack Wilson asserts, "I wuz born wid spiritual knowledge which gib me duh power tuh read duh mines of people. I kin see people wut bin dead many yeahes" (7). For blacks who did believe in the power of magic, conjure was conceived as an African power. Despite the fact that the

practice of conjure combined both African and European elements, conjure was believed to have derived from an African heritage and knowledge. The strongest of conjure men were described as "pure" or genuine Africans.[34] A former Georgia slave, Thomas Smith, relied on the Bible to "prove" that the power of conjure derived from Africa. He cites Moses's ability to transform his rod into a snake as proof of his conjecture:

> Dat happen in Africa de Bible say. Ain' dat show dat Africa was a lan uh magic powah since de beginnin uh history? Well duh descendents ub Africans hab duh same gif tuh do unnatchal ting. (*Drums*, 28)

Some African-born slaves, moreover, were believed to have the power to fly back to Africa[35]--a belief which has found expression in numerous contemporary works of fiction.[36] Conjure stipulated that African slaves were to be lauded and feared for the very quality for which they were despised in American political and economic system--that is, their Africanness. The repetition of this theme that African-born slaves had incredible powers indicates the depth and strength of the belief that power was a birthright, despite prevailing conditions of social and political disenfranchisement, despite what the social norms of the time might stipulate.

The slaves created their own discourse about magic which empowered themselves and validated their heritage. While conjure did not derive only from Africa but from Europe as well, this did not stop slaves from creating their own discourses, stories, and meanings about magic. These stories and signifiers of magic

were strong enough to create a buffer against the dehumanizing effects of slavery and to instigate outward forms of rebellion. As cultural historian Lawrence Levine puts it, "[m]agical folk beliefs did give many slaves the courage and determination to indulge in acts they otherwise would have had difficulty committing: standing up to the master, moving freely about the plantation, conspiring to escape, even in some instances rebelling itself" (75). In Haiti, the revolution of 1792-1804 was instigated by vodun doctors. In the United States, Denmark Vesey depended on conjure in his conspiracy of 1822. I will briefly examine the Vesey conspiracy, as an example of the ways that magical folk beliefs can aid slave resistance.

Denmark Vesey was, by all accounts, an accomplished man who was well-read and travelled. He was born either in Africa or the Caribbean, bought his freedom after twenty years of being a slave, and then started a carpenter's shop in Charleston, South Carolina. As a slave, he travelled with his master, Joseph Vesey, a sea captain, between West India and Africa. Witnesses indicate that he saw Haiti as an object lesson for American slaves and he developed personal contacts with revolutionaries in Haiti. Testimony indicates that the planning of the conspiracy lasted four years, although it is unknown how many conspirators he recruited. The revolt was planned for July 14, 1822, but they were betrayed and met by armed whites as they approached Charleston. The conspirators were apprehended, taken to court, and within five weeks and half, thirty five people were hanged, including Vesey himself. Unlike Gabriel Prosser who

disavowed any reliance on religion altogether, and Nat Turner who relied only on Christianity, Vesey addressed the syncretic and complex nature of slave beliefs and society through his reliance on Christianity and conjure.[37] In order to convert slaves to his cause and to give them courage, Vesey would read passages from the Bible which depicted the undeserved enslavement of Jews by Egyptians and the divine deliverance of Jews from bondage. One of his favorite passages was Exodus 21:16: "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hands, he shall surely be put to death." Vesey used this passage to convince his followers that no whites were to be spared, that all were guilty and deserved to die. He deliberately took advantage of the power of folk beliefs and merged it with an appeal to Old Testament Christianity, for he knew that magic would be a powerful force in uniting and rallying his co-conspirators into action. He depended upon Gullah Jack as the religious embodiment of the movement.

Gullah Jack was African-born and had a formidable reputation as a conjure priest and doctor. The followers of Vesey were told that they would be rendered invincible and immune to the bullets of white people. The followers of the conspiracy were mortally afraid of Jack, and the trial record indicates that it was very difficult to convince them to speak against the conjure doctor. Only one follower did testify against Jack and his statement reveals the depth of influence commanded by the conjure doctor:

> Gullah Jack is an enemy of the white people. . . . Jack said if any man betrayed them, they would injure him, and I was afraid to inform. . . . If I am accepted as a witness and my life spared, I must beg the Court to send me away from this place, *as I consider my life in great danger from having given testimony*. . . . I was afraid of Gullah Jack as a conjurer. (Cited in Richard Starobin, ed., *Denmark Vesey: The Slave Conspiracy of 1822* 43)

Gullah Jack's death unleashed a wave of testimonies against him which had been previously stemmed by the belief in his power. One slave reported, "Until Jack was taken up and condemned to death, I felt as if I was bound up, and had not the power to speak one word about it" (*Denmark Vesey 45*). Gullah Jack promised his followers that the use of his magic would render them invincible. During the trial of Vesey, one follower reported of Jack:

> he gave me some dry food, consisting of parched corn and ground nuts, and said eat that and nothing else on the morning it breaks out, and when you join us as we pass put into your mouth this crab-claw and then you can't be wounded, and said he, I give the same to the rest of my troops--if you drop the large crab-claw out of your mouth, then put in the small one. (*Denmark Vesey* 41-42)

Crab claws, parched corn, and ground nuts create a different technology of resistance. The Vesey conspiracy was betrayed and did not achieve its goals, but these slaves had the courage to spend four years planning their rebellion and believed they

would win. One cannot measure resistance only by the success it achieves. Although magic might not produce the desired effects, it is nevertheless a powerful rallying force and technology of power for its believers. Conjure as a folk belief demonstrates that subordinate cultures provide competing versions of reality and alternative means of resistance.

I focus on the practice of magic, then, as a way to read and understand the processes and psychology of those who refuse to be oppressed and also to draw attention to the ambiguity and constructedness of discourses surrounding power. As one historical strategy of psychological and material resistance, the practice of magic allows me to stress the importance of the imagination, culture, and hope in the process of living a dignified life under conditions of severe oppression. This study of the practice of magic also enables me to question normative understandings of power, discourse, and reality, in as much as magic is a part of reality and yet challenges traditionalist assumptions of what reality means. In a culture of folk religion, magic is part of everyday life. It is neither transcendent, other, nor exotic. At the same time, magic pushes the boundaries of traditional and positivistic definitions of reality. Whereas a positivist assessment of reality might conclude that the monopoly of fire arms, technical skill, and military experience leads to incontrovertible success in a revolution, a magical perspective might not. As Gullah Jack's crab claws show, there are always other "technologies" that

influence rebellions. By examining the practice and belief system of magic, I also draw attention to the process of meaning-making itself. There are other forms of knowledge by which to create meaning, values, and knowledge. The system of belief surrounding magic throws into relief hegemonic interpretations or interpellations of reality.

Notes to Chapter 1

[1]Both Levine and Raboteau stress that the magical folk beliefs in the New World derived from African and European beliefs in the spiritual world. Raboteau points out that because "magical beliefs tend to be similar worldwide, and because it is the nature of magical thinking to be eclectic, it is rarely possible to speak with certainty about the origins of particular magical practices" (33). However, he also argues that there are a number of magical beliefs that are nonetheless "demonstrably African in origin. For example, there is a custom amongst Mississippi black folk of "cutting" a storm with an ax. Raboteau writes that the "use of the ax as an antidote to the storm is significant, since the sacred element of the West African god of thunder and lightning, Shango, is an ax; but what is equally significant is the fact that the African theological background has disappeared and what remains is a folk custom" (80-81).

[2]The *fetish* is term which does not accurately portray actual African beliefs or practices but rather the oppressive ideology of the time. It is so loaded with colonial sentiment and ideology that ethnographers claim it is a corrupt term and refuse to use it in good conscience. Wyatt MacGaffey, for instance, argues that the *fetish* "went out of favour more because it became an embarrassment than because it was inadequate to the phenomenon," ("Fetishism Revisited: Kongo Nkisi in Sociological Perspective" 172; quoted in Pietz 1, 6). R.S. Rattray feels that the *fetish* distorts the complex system of religious and cultural practices and prefers to use "what the Akan-speaking African calls a śuman," *(Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 9; quoted in Pietz 1, 6].

[3]See Pietz II, especially 24-26.

[4]Due to such variety and complexity, magic resists any easy definition. A detailed presentation of the many types of magic practiced--as various as the use of amulets, ritual, recitation, divination, blood-letting, and astrology--is beyond the scope of this discussion. Kieckhefer, who does enter into a lively discussion of the many varieties of magical practices and their applications, provides an interesting case study of the ubiquity and ambiguity of magic. A brief presentation of one of his historical examples indicates the pervasiveness of magic in Europe during the Middle Ages and the importance of the role played by material reality in magical ritual. Kieckhefer makes reference to a book of household management from Wolsthurn Castle in the Tyrol which dates from the fifteenth century. The manuscript, states Kieckhefer, gives advice in running a large estate and the compiler was probably a layperson rather than a monk. Alongside information about how to make soap, to wash clothes, and prepare leather, the manuscript includes formulations of magic, conjure, and divination. For instance, the manuscript documents a remedy for epilepsy which is clearly magic: the formula is based on the notion that the sickness must

be transferred from the individual to a scrap of deerskin which would then be buried with a corpse, in the world of the dead. As Kieckhefer relates the formula: "one puts a deerskin strap around the patient's neck while he is suffering a seizure, then one 'binds' the sickness to the strap 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' and finally one buries the strap along with a dead man" (*Magic in the Middle Ages* 4). The manuscript was not written by any particular magician, but rather by an anonymous layperson who was most probably part of the household management staff. These remedies and rituals were most likely not thought of as magical by their practitioners in the household.

[5]In Graeco-Roman times, people believed that spirits or demons could cross between the world of men and gods; these spirits could be either good or evil, but were not associated solely with either moral suasion.

[6]Pietz argues that the concept of the *fetisso* differed from that of the *feitico* insofar as that *fetissos* "were not false gods in the traditional sense, but rather were quasi-personal divine powers associated more closely with the materiality of the sacramental object than would be an independent immaterial demonic spirit" (Pietz 11, 38).

[7]See Pietz II, especially pages 41-45.

[8]See William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*.

[9]Pietz makes a similar point. See IIIa, 110.

[10]Quoted in Pietz IIIa, footnote 9. Nicholas Villault, *Relation des costes d'Afrique, appellees Guinee*.

[11]J. Barbot also makes a similar point about the fancifulness and indeed arbitrariness of West African religious worship. In 1732, in his *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea* vol 5., Barbot follows Don Augustin Manoel Vasconcelos in saying: "they make deities out of any thing that is new to them, or extraordinary in itself, a large tall tree, the bones of whale, high rocks, &c. so that it may be said of them, their gods are any thing that is prodigious; and no nation in all the world is more addicted to the folly of soothsaying and casting lots than they are (310). See John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea*.

[12]See Pietz II for a discussion of the meaning and implications of the *fetish* as "trifling."

[13]See Pietz III and Manuel's *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*.

[14]This attitude was derived, at least partly, by travel narratives' depictions of African belief in the influence of *fetishes* over physical health and life itself. As Atkins writes about an African he names "Captain Tom": "He believes (the *fetish*) able to protect from Dangers, or recover from Sickness; so that, in Travail, or any Ailment, they never are without the *Fetish* about them, whom they constantly *Dashee* for Health and

Safety." John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and The West Indies* 100-1.

[15]Hayden White writes that the "historical thinkers in the main line of rationalism--Bayle, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, and Gibbon--were engaged in a ground-clearing operation on behalf of an ideal which necessarily required that the crucial cultural relationships be conceived in terms of oppositions rather than continuities or subtle gradations. Their most creative work was critical rather than constructive, directed against irrationalism in whatever form it appeared, whether as superstition, ignorance, or tyranny, or as emotion, myth, or passion. It was in their interest to view the past (and especially the remote past) as *the opposite* of that which they valued in their own present, not as *the basis* of it. Hayden White, "The Irrational and the Problem of Historical Knowledge in the Enlightenment," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture; Irrationalism in the Eighteenth Century* vol 2, 318.

[16]West African religions were considered to be foolish, irrational, inferior, diseased; in the New World they were considered to be sinister, sexualized, and racialized.

[17]According to Lawrence Levine, in North America the "retention of traditional beliefs and practices was facilitated by the delay that occurred in the conversion of the African slaves to Christianity" (60).

[18]Barry Chevannes points out that the word Obeah has come to refer in modern-day lexicon, erroneously enough, to both forms of magical practices, malevolent and benevolent ("Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" 7).

[19]William Wedenoja argues that Balm is a practice of healing associated with Revival. While healers are both men and women, a greater proportion are women. Wedenoja observes that "[t]here are many women in positions of leadership in Revival cults and, in my area, 54 percent were headed by women. In addition, while only 46 percent of the male leaders of Revival cults practiced Balm, 64 percent of those headed by women did so" (86).

[20]Chevannes argues that Myal was the root of Revival and now thrives under the name Native Baptist ("New Approach to Rastafari" 22).

[21] Chevannes tells us that in the 1950's, Claudius Henry, a returned migrant from the United States, established himself as a leader in the Rastafarian movement. In 1958, he proclaimed October 5 to be "decision day" when all Rastafari would return to Africa. For the price of one shilling, Jamaicans could purchase a blue card, which ostensibly was a passport to Africa. When the repatriation failed, hundreds of followers were disappointed. Scandal followed, a year and a half later, when, as Chevannes notes, the police "uncovered an arms cache and copies of a letter written by Henry and several others addressed to the new leader of neighbouring Cuba, Fidel Castro, inviting him to take over Jamaica before their departure for Africa, which the writers claimed was imminent" ("Introducing the Native Religions of Africa" 13). Charges of treason followed, as did

further scandal: "two British soldiers were killed in an ambush by guerillas led by Henry's son, Ronald. . . . the police infiltrated the group, only to discover a guerilla training camp" (13).

[22]For a discussion of the reasons women first joined the Rastafarian movement and how they later became more vocal, see Maureen Rowe's "The Women in Rastafari."

[23]J. Besson agrees with Chevannes' conclusion about Rastafarianism as a movement of cultural resistance. See "Religion as Resistance in Jamaican Peasant Life."

[24]Many scholars warn not to take this syncreticism too far; anthropologist Michel Laguerre has argued that this syncreticism has been largely one of magic and material. See "An Ecological Approach to Voodoo," 11.

[25]During the Salem witchtrials in New England, not only were whites accused of witchcraft, so too were blacks--although they made up less than one percent of the population: Old Pharaoh, Mary Black, and Candy. The fate of the first, Old Pharaoh, is unknown; the second Mary Black, refused to confess and was imprisoned; and the third, Candy, confessed to the crime of witchcraft and was imprisoned. Moreover, McMillan states that whites not only accused blacks of witchcraft, but on several occasions blacks also accused whites (106). Tituba is the famous example of a West Indian woman accused of witchcraft. See Timothy J. McMillan "Black Magic: Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England," 99-117.

[26]Hurston's anthropological account of this initiation, *Mules and Men*, was published in 1935.

[27]Cited in Michael Mullin, *Africa in America*, 176.

[28]Cited in Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 289-90.

[29]A Minister of the Gospel, "'Tatler' on the Management of Negroes," *Southern Cultivator*, IX (June, 1851), 84-85; cited in Genovese, 216.

[30]Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases*, III, 367-368; II, 43; II, 414. As Levine points out, some whites rewarded slaves for their knowledge of medicines and root work. In 1729, the governor of Virginia granted a slave his freedom in exchange for the secret of his medicines. The South Carolina slave Caesar had so perfected a cure for rattlesnake bite that he was also rewarded his freedom in 1750. Levine 64.

[31]Most anthropologists point out that possession and ancestor veneration as such did not carry over into the United States (outside of Louisiana which carried over Haitian traditions); ecstatic behavior, such as the ring shout, is the closest that conjure comes to approximating possession.

[32]Even slaves who would not admit a belief in conjure, would readily admit a belief in signs. Ex-slave, Fred Jones, referring to conjure says, "I dohn believe in them things. I dohn believe in nuthin like that. It's too dangerous. But I do believe in some signs. Yuh watch em and yuh'll see that they dohn nevuh fail." See *Drums and Shadows*, 27.

[33]In his slave narrative, Henry Bibb documents how he also turned to conjure as a measure of control over his life, although he did not find magic a particularly effective means to achieve his goals. Enlisting the aid of a conjure man to avoid being flogged, Bibb was given a powder and told to "sprinkle it about my master, if he should offer to strike me; this would prevent him" (70). Although this remedy worked at first, Bibb became overconfident and "commenced talking saucy to him"--which earned him a whipping despite his roots and powders. The power of conjure had a strong appeal for Bibb: "I had been taught by the old superstitious slave, to believe in conjuration, and it was hard for me to give up the notion, for all I had been deceived by them" (73). While magic did not achieve its ends, it perhaps provided other benefits for Bibb which he did not recognize at the time.

[34]Frederick Douglass describes the conjure man Sandy as a "genuine African."

[35]One ex-slave, Priscilla McCullough, tells a story of flying Africans who gain their freedom through magical abilities: "Duh slabes wuz in duh fiel wukin. All ub a sudden duy git tuhgedduh an staht tuh moob roun in a ring. Roun dey go fastuhnfastuh. Den one by one dey riz up and take wing an fly lak a bud. Duh oberseeuh heah duh noise an he come out an he see duh slabes rise up in duh eah an fly back tuh Africa" (*Drums*, 154).

[36] See Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for a Widow*; for a film rendition of this belief in flying Africans, see Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*.

[37]Eugene Genovese makes this point in *Roll Jordan Roll*, 594.

Chapter 2

Representations of Writing in Claude McKay's *A Long Way From Home* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*

> What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? In our great-grandmothers' day? It is a question cruel enough to stop the blood.
> "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" 402

Before Alice Walker's search for and validation of Zora Neale Hurston as her literary foremother in the 1970's, African-American writers viewed black literature as reading material unworthy of perusal, much less of literary patrimony. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues, early black writers imagined that their work ushered in a new era.[1] The 'father' of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke claimed that a new era in writing for the New Negro had arrived ("The New Negro" 22). In 1937, Richard Wright argued that "Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America" ("Blueprint for Negro Writing" 98). And in 1966, Amiri Baraka made sweeping, offhanded claims about the "mediocrity of what has been called 'Negro Literature'" and the "spectacular vapidity of the American Negro's accomplishment" ("The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'" 166).

While Alice Walker is the first writer to recognize the power of her African-American literary tradition and to name another African-American writer as the creative source of her writing, African-diasporic writers have not been completely

unappreciative of their tradition's creative expression. From the Negritude poets to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, many writers have acknowledged the creativity of folk heritage,[2] a rubric which includes many subsets, one of them being folk religion. This chapter examines the connections between folk religion and writing, between folk heritage and literary creation. How have writers named or recognized folk tradition in relation to their own writing? At what point does the writer act as a conjure doctor who calls up and creates literature, who transforms reality through the magical power of words? I argue that Claude McKay and Zora Neale Hurston not only write *about* their folk heritage in legitimizing ways, they write *from* it. Claude McKay's autobiography and novels begin to point towards a concept of creativity that grounds itself in a complex imagination that moves between syncretic sources. It is Hurston, however, who truly recognizes the potential of folk religion as a source of writing and innovation. Although she is not the first African-diasporic writer to focus on folk religion in fiction, she effectively *transforms* folk religion into a source of writing, a nexus of meaning, a trope for the magical and fluid creation of signification. French Caribbean Negritude poets turned to folk religion as evidence of an essential African culture, and Harlem Renaissance writers conceived of folk culture as an indicator of authentic, albeit unsophisticated, Negro creativity. Hurston, however, stands out as a rare writer who portrays folk religion as a sign of writing itself--a writer who uses folk religion to undercut a concept of

authentic, unitary origins. Through folk religion, she depicts a kind of writing full of turns and twists, a writing that resists any static or fixed interpretations, one that by its very performance challenges dominant concepts of origins, language, and creativity. This kind of writing, which I call conjure writing, is practiced to varying degrees by both McKay and Hurston, who do (paradoxically) ascribe to a notion of authentic origins at times, but then immediately move to contradict such assumptions.

Reason, Writing, and Tradition

In the 1920's, black writers and intellectuals evinced an increasing focus on folk heritage as a source of creativity and writing. In the Caribbean, Negritude arose as a powerful cultural nationalist movement that validated Africa and its diasporic cultures. In the 1930's in Paris, Leopold Sedar Senghor from Senegal, Aimee Cesaire from Martinique, and Leon Damas from French Guiana articulated a concept of black cultural nationalism that ostensibly spoke to an international black community. Influenced by surrealism, Marxism, and Harlem Renaissance poetry, Senghor, Cesaire, and Damas hoped to create a neo-African nationalism by challenging Europe's claim to reason and by reclaiming Africa as a source of cultural pride.[3] They did so by turning to an African past and conceiving folk culture and religion as sources of blackness and Negro originality. The poets attempted to reject the confining notions

of reason inherited from the dominant Eurocentric tradition. Senghor, for instance, argued that emotion was an essentially Negroid characteristic. Reversing a Cartesian binary of reason over body, he wrote that "Negro reason . . . is not, as one might guess, the discursive reason of Europe, *reason through sight*, but *reason through touch* . . . " ("The Psychology of the African Negro"; cited in Charles Johnson's *Being and Race* 18). Senghor defined Negritude as "the cultural patrimony, the values, and above all the spirit of Negro African civilization" (cited in Kesteloot 102).

For the French writers of the Caribbean, surrealism provided a way to break with old forms of Eurocentric writing and reason; it provided a way to challenge dominant versions of reality. Aimee Cesaire, for instance, uses surrealism and folk culture to discard old forms of reason. Through the power of words, he attempts to establish a different epistemology of the Negro. He writes,

> Words?
> Ah yes, words!
> Reason, I appoint you wind of the evening.
> Mouth of authority, be the whip's corolla.
> Beauty, I name you petition of stone.
> But ah! my hoarse contraband laughter
> Ah! my saltpeter treasure!
> Because we hate you, you and
> your reason, we claim kinship with
> dementia praecox with flaming madness
> with tenacious cannibalism
> . . .
>
> (*Return to My Native Land* 55)

Cesaire takes stereotypes and inverts them--investing traditionally negative characteristics with valor, glory, and beauty. Through the shattering of reason's primacy, the poets of

the Negritude movement claimed a kind of authority in an African-based cultural practice and used folk religion to assert the authenticity of black cultural essences. The Negritude movement was later criticized for its reversal of received binary oppositions which reinscribed the very assumptions it hoped to dismantle. Partly due to this philosophic flaw, the popularity of both Negritude and surrealism waned by the 1960's.

Unlike the Caribbean's focus on surrealism in poetry, African America focussed on social realism as a way to challenge dominant versions of reality. The Harlem Renaissance, like the Negritude movement, was highly nationalistic and it was similarly preoccupied with finding an "authentic" form of black expression: folk culture became a focus of interest for writers. But how to represent this folk art? And what role did folk heritage play in relationship to literature? W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke believed that artists should write *about* folk religion rather than *from* it. In other words, they believed that folk heritage could provide an appropriate subject for literature, but that the educated elite needed to change and revise folk art, to transform it into an articulate artistic expression that could challenge dominant stereotypes and racist knowledges. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* expressed its respect for black folk culture through the black musical notation and lyrics at the opening of each chapter. However, Du Bois also views folk culture through the lens of nineteenth-century European culture: "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and

Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. . . . I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will . . . So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil" (284). Similarly, Locke also evinced a complex relationship to folk culture that exposed his dependence on received notions of writing and literature. He claimed that "the Negro has already made very substantial contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, . . . but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways." While he asserted that folk art was one of the Negro's contributions to American society, he also argued that folk culture must be transformed into art. He writes that folk art must be *raised* to the "altitudes of art" ("The New Negro" 48). He states that no "sane observer, however sympathetic to the new trend, would contend that the great masses are articulate as yet" ("The New Negro" 24).

Unlike the poets of the Negritude movement who deployed more experimental modes of writing such as surrealism to represent alternate forms of reality, the earlier (male) vanguard of the Harlem Renaissance used social realism to lay claim to a more "accurate" form of reality. Folk culture was a subject of literature, not a transformative or originating source for literature. *The Souls of Black Folk*, for instance, was written for a white audience and to challenge dominant stereotypes of black folk as criminal, lazy, and unoriginal. Du Bois hoped to lift the veil so that white people could judge black folk by their souls and not by their bodies. He wrote, "We who are dark can see America in a way that white Americans can

not" ("Criteria of Negro Art" 61). While he believed that black people could provide a kind of knowledge to America that would dismantle hegemonic and naturalized epistemologies, he also assumed that the "other" could be known in objective and neutral fashion--that the veil could be lifted, in other words, and that black folk could be then understood in unproblematic ways. Similarly, Alain Locke believed in the transparency of knowledge, in the ability to lift the veil, as it were. He argued that literature needed to challenge dominant stereotypes of blacks and to confront social and political reality head on through the "enlightened" mode of social realism. In "The Saving Grace of Realism," he advocated that

> we must look to enlightened realism as the present hope of Negro art and literature, not merely because it is desirable for our art to be in step with the prevailing mode and trend of the art and literature of its time,--important though that may be--but because both practical and aesthetic interests dictate truth as the basic desideratum in the portrayal of the Negro,--and truth is the saving grace of realism. (273)

For Locke, the veil becomes a mirror which clearly reflects the Negro in undistorted and "truthful" fashion. He wrote, "Fiction is as bold and revealing as sociology" (266). Locke argued that good literature was akin to a science which could objectively reveal and dissect racism. In "Black Truth and Black Beauty," he referred to literature as "sharp-edged, surgical prose, drastically probing, boldly cutting down to the quick of the

Negro problem" (266). Both Du Bois and Locke were so occupied with fighting racism on terms laid out by the dominant discourse, that they borrowed a language of reason and science as a way to challenge racism. In this way, they did not perhaps fully realize the potential of folk religion and culture to provide alternative modes of knowing and writing. Theirs was an understanding of literature as mimetic. Thus folk religion, with its magic, could not be viewed as anything but quaint--not as a writing, an art, or a creative articulation.

McKay's and Hurston's autobiographies reveal how they turn to syncretic sources as influences for their writing, how they move between notions of "high" and "low" culture in order to locate the site of their literary patrimony. I turn to their autobiographies because the genre provides an understanding of how each writer imaginatively conceives of his or her own creativity. That is, autobiography becomes a place where the connections between fiction and reality, imagination and truth meet--an interstice in which both writers appear to assume the power of magic locates itself.

Claude McKay's *A Long Way From Home*

McKay's autobiography *A Long Way From Home* documents a complex picture of his creative and intellectual development.[4] The autobiography charts the history of McKay's identity as a writer--his journey from the Caribbean, to America, and then to Europe. The text fails to provide information about McKay's

private life or, indeed, about his origins and life in Jamaica; rather, it focuses on the elements he believes to be central to becoming a black writer. It is now well established in contemporary theory that the self is not a fixed essence, that autobiography is a process of self-invention through language. Through the strategic placement of images and conversations, *A Long Way From Home* proves to be a revelation of self through others, a construction of subjectivity through linguistic strategies. Unlike traditional autobiographies, McKay does not begin with his birth and then proceed with the details of his private and public life. He appears to be strangely missing in his own autobiography--taking on an anonymous and vagabond role. As the title of the first section of his autobiography tells us, he begins his life story with his "American Beginning"--with his birth as a writer in America. Beginnings prove to be chosen, constructed, and literary things. McKay does not disclose his private thoughts or personal life. Rather, he gives us a tour de force of the writers he meets and the literary circles he travels in America and abroad. Indeed, McKay, who refers to himself as an internationalist, plots his autobiography like a train itinerary--as a series of travels through America, Europe, and Russia.

One might wonder why McKay tells us so much about the men he meets, such as Frank Harris, Max Eastman, and George Bernard Shaw, and so little about himself. Upon close inspection, it is becomes clear that he uses his conversations with these men in order to reveal as much about himself as he does about them. In

this way, McKay uses a folk strategy of defining self through community. Paradoxically, McKay allows the educated classes to tell us of himself, while he concomitantly undermines his own associations with the educated elite through a series of oppositional images. For example, the autobiography opens with McKay's first encounter with Frank Harris, editor of *Pearson's Magazine*, a meeting notable for its references to opera, fine wine, and discussions of Spencer and Shakespeare. Nonetheless, McKay tells us that he travels to this meeting as a waiter on a train and that on his journey he is detained by the police in Pittsburgh for failing to produce the proper papers. He meticulously constructs a picture of himself both as a literate and working-class black man. He thus creates a picture of himself through the pairing of oppositions, a combination of images, and the proximity of contradictory notions. In his chapter outlining the political and personal importance of the term "white friend," McKay tells about his friendships with white men such as Frank Harris and Max Eastman (editor for *The Liberator*). Soon after, McKay tells about another white friend of his--a pickpocket named Michael. For each move that appears to put McKay squarely in a high-powered and upper-class world of writers and literary notables, he makes another move that destabilizes this relationship with the literary elite and stresses his affinity with another kind of person altogether.

McKay's depiction of selfhood reveals a doubled narrative strategy that complicates the boundaries between class positions, and ultimately locates creativity in the interstice

between the working and educated classes. McKay's autobiography does not linger over detailed representations of folk heritage in general, or folk religion in particular. However, McKay appears to conceive of the working class as a kind of urban folk. The working class protagonists in his novels are often folk artists in one way or another: in *Banjo*, for example, the protagonist is an itinerant musician. Moreover, as critic Joyce Hope Scott points out, "*Home to Harlem* and *Black Thunder* construct their heroes along the lines of the black folk hero--the black Moses and the trickster" (124). One can always recognize the members of the working class in McKay's work for, while they can be found throughout the urban centers of the world, they are an anonymous, nomadic group of people who have energy, creativity, and passion--characteristics that McKay assumes are crucial to the ability to write. A writer who influenced the Negritude movement, McKay borders on an essentialist understanding of class and race. He imagines that the black working class possesses intrinsic traits which he romanticizes as the source of a "primitive" and authentic creative energy.

McKay locates his own creativity in the interstices between what he views as "primitive" energy of the working class and the knowledge of the educated elite. Arguing that civilization can hinder and destroy their creative energy, he suggests that an artist spend time among the working class. He writes that he is "partial to the idea of an artist being of and among the people, even if incognito" (244). With fame he loses

creativity and inspiration and he "leg[s] along limpingly with the intellectual gang" (114). Surrounded by intellectuals and losing his place among the folk, he finds it difficult to "light up . . . the spontaneous flames of original creative efforts," for he loses that "rare feeling of a vagabond feeding upon secret music singing in [him]" (114).

A complex picture, then, arises concerning McKay's concept of creative energy and writing. Although he may represent the working class in monolithic and ahistorical ways, he also problematizes his own essentialist equation of the "low-down Negro" as the original site of energy, travel, passion, and creativity. Creative energy is facilitated in the interstice between the urban folk and the educated. In his fiction, the folk are always mapped in relationship to the educated; the two poles prove to be irrevocably intertwined. The working class and the educated are represented as doubles or alter egos. The main protagonists in *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom* are "low-down," working-class, or uneducated men who are paired with their educated opposites. In *Home to Harlem*, Jake is a nomadic longshoreman whose double is Ray, a writer educated at Howard. In *Banjo*, an itinerant musician named Banjo is also paired with Ray who has moved to France. In *Banana Bottom*, Bita is a Jamaican girl educated in England who is engaged to an educated black man who proves to be morally and sexually degenerate; she shocks the community by crossing class lines when she marries Jubban instead, a hired and uneducated drayman. It is only through the marriage of her opposites in class and education

that she finds a sense of wholeness and happiness. Further, McKay not only pairs the folk with the educated in his fiction, but in his autobiography as well. In *A Long Way From Home*, he represents himself as a man who straddles two worlds. He exposes the extent and depth of his own learning and education, but he also locates the energy of his writing in the working class. Not only has he read Bernard Shaw and Shakespeare, as he is careful to tell us, but he specifically describes himself as a "troubador wanderer" (354).

McKay uses his ambivalent relationship to the urban folk to articulate a theory of representation and writing. He points out that writing cannot represent reality without transforming it. On one hand, he claims to be part of the "working class"--to be an insider, as it were. He writes, "when I came to write about the low-down Negro, I did not have to compose him from an outside view. Nor did I have to write a pseudo-romantic account, as do bourgeois persons who have become working class for a while" (228). But, at the same time, he is also careful to note that he is not identical to the working class--that he does not have pure, unmediated access to the folk through words. His contemporary critics often read his fiction as an unmediated, autobiographical representation of his own character and make an unproblematic equation of McKay's love life with his protagonists'. In response, he consciously distances himself from the characters he depicts in his fiction. In his writing, he draws attention to the mediating effects that come with knowledge and writing. He responds: "My damned white education

has robbed me of much of the primitive vitality, the pure stamina, the simple unswaggering strength of the Jakes of the Negro race" (229). In other words, McKay plots a complex relationship to education, language, and knowledge. If his language enables him to "represent" that reality, at the same time his education creates a distance between him and the reality he "records." Using his own position as a writer to locate in the black working class a possible source of vital creativity, McKay outlines the distance between language and the reality it portrays.

McKay's view that writing and meaning arise out of the conjunctive space between the working class and the educated informs his concept about cultural nationalism. His idea of a "real" Negro renaissance is that "of talented persons of an ethnic or national group working individually or collectively in a common purpose and creating things that would be typical of their group" (321). He is opposed to the notion that a renaissance should be a class uplift organization--that literature is transparent, that race is so monolithic its secrets can be betrayed before the unforgiving gaze of the dominant group. He expresses his surprise at how many Negroes "regarded their renaissance more as an uplift organization and a vehicle to accelerate the pace and progress of smart Negro society" (321). For McKay, the working class do not need to be "tidied up" in literature in order to please the bourgeois tastes of the "respectable" class of whites and blacks. Rejecting a class-based notion of representation that leads to

an essentialized concept of race, he writes: "So many of the Negro elite love to mouth that phrase about 'betraying the race'! As if the Negro group had special secrets which could not be divulged to the other groups" (317). That is, he challenges the essentialist notion that certain races are associated with negative characteristics or "secrets." Thus while he may assert that the black working class is a fundamental site of primitive energy, he also disputes the fact that groups of people have inborn characteristics. The urban folk can never be known in any complete or absolute way, for they are not a hegemonic unity which can be transformed into the "other" in a totalized system of recognizable signs.

While folk religion is not necessarily related to the folk, folk religion nevertheless plays an important role in McKay's autobiography for it reveals how he conceives of truth and objectivity. At the very beginning of his autobiography, for instance, McKay uses his conversation with Frank Harris to reveal his lack of belief in any kind of religion--be it Christianity or folk religion. He tells the editor for *Pearson's Magazine* that he "grew up without religious instruction at home" (12). Moreover, he evinces a loss of respect for Harris once the latter exposes his own fervent Christianity. Although there is a marked absence of folk religion in his autobiography, McKay does *not* adopt the pose of the consummate rationalist who believes in "objective" truth and who denigrates folk religion as an invalid form of knowledge. Rather than take a hard-line scientific approach which lauds only logic (as Frank Harris appears to

take), McKay indicates his distance from his more militant youth when he believed in absolute truth: he tells us, "in those burgeoning days I was a zealot for the truth as something absolute" (14).

Through his portrayal of folk religion, McKay makes the point that truth is predicated upon a heterogeneity of sources and meaning-making systems. McKay claims not to believe in "superstition," but he does portray folk religion in respectful ways. In doing so, he maps for himself a strange relationship to folk religion. In a chapter entitled "When A Negro Goes Native," McKay travels to Morocco and sees a magical religious rite akin to Jamaican Myalism. Writing about religion with a kind of intellectual detachment, he does not make much of the religious rite except to register shock at its familiarity and proximity to Jamaican Myalism. He writes, the "first shock I registered was the realization that they looked and acted exactly like certain peasants of Jamaica who give themselves up to celebrating of a religious sing-dance orgy which is known as Myalism" (297). While his encounter with folk religion in Morocco might appear to be innocuous, it does carry with it some significance. Whether he likes it or not, he is a strange participant in the ritual----he has an inverted form of power exhibited by folk religion participants. The performers of the rite believe that he is a strange spirit and a hindrance to the ceremony--and therefore he must leave (297). Thus "When A Negro Goes Native" in North Africa, the first thing he witnesses is a magical folk religion rite. In this way, McKay reveals to us

that folk religion is an important part of a Negro's nativity, a vital element in the rediscovery of his roots in Africa and the diaspora. By travelling to North Africa, McKay is able to journey--at least intellectually and imaginatively--back to his childhood roots in Jamaica and thus to his self. Although folk religion proves to be one possible link to a Negro's nativity, folk religion proves to have no singular, authentic origins--it can be found in Jamaica and Morocco. Disputing his own engagement with folk religion and yet documenting his cultural relationship to it, he reveals that folk religion is not a hegemonic system of epistemology in which all blacks believe--it is a legitimate cultural practice which he recognizes as part of his heritage.

In addition to describing directly folk practices, McKay uses a secularized language of folk religion as a way to depict the process of writing itself. He appears to have a nominal relationship to folk religion; however, he borrows the rhetoric of folk religion and converts it into a trope for representation. His work is notable for his repetition of the word "magic." In McKay's lexicon, "magic" signifies a transformative ability, an ability to create culture or art. On one hand, magic appears to be related to words and names. For example, he writes about the magic in the name Petrograd: "Lenin is mightier than Peter the Great. But there is no magic in the name of Leningrad" (157). The change in the name of the city produces for McKay a loss in beauty: "I feel that the world has lost the poetry and the color rising like a rainbow out of a

beautiful name since Petrograd was changed to Leningrad" (157). A kind of creativity, magic is related to the ability to create great cities and culture: "By a kind of magic instinct the Spaniards have created a modern town" (308). But if the magic of creativity is located within the agency of an individual, it also the product of larger socio-historical forces. He writes that cities produce his poetry--that he is a medium for the voice and consciousness of the people. He informs his reader that, in a magical act, "Petrograd had pulled a poem out of me" (223). He tells us early on in his autobiography that he has not chosen to write poetry: but rather "poetry had picked me as a medium instead of my picking poetry as a profession" (61). In *Banana Bottom*, McKay gives a summary of magic which indicates his usage of the word: "above dreary levels of existence everywhere . . . the radiant, the mysterious, the wonderful, the strange great moments whose magic may be caught by any clairvoyant mind and turned into magical form for the joy of man" (310).[5] Writing, in other words, is not a function of logos and Enlightenment versions of reason, but of magic and clairvoyance.

When a Negro goes native, he learns about folk religion but also about literature. Returning to Morocco, McKay learns about a North African poet named Antar. Throughout his autobiography, McKay discusses the literature which has influenced him in detail. Writing, for McKay, is not a racially or culturally monolithic activity. He is careful to discuss the influence of a wide spectrum of writers which comprise his sense

of a canon of great literature--from Russian to English to African-American writers. He articulates his admiration and respect for Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*. He writes that "Du Bois is a great passionate polemic, and America should honor and exalt him even if it disagrees with his views. For his passion is genuine, and contemporary polemics is so destitute of the pure flame of passion that the nation should be proud of a man who has made of it a great art" (110). He also places James Weldon Johnson in the category of great and influential writers (112). However, he does not substitute one canon for another. He discusses George Bernard Shaw, Shakespeare, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, and Tolstoy. Moreover, when he travels to North Africa, he destabilizes the notion of a singular (Western) canon of "great" literature by placing a North African writer, Antar, alongside other canonized writers such as Homer and Virgil. He does so to challenge claims that Negroes should not write poetry--or more specifically, that they should not write love poetry. McKay reveals in his autobiography that he is often asked why he has chosen poetry over pugilism. When one critic asserts that "McKay['s love poetry] never offends our sensibilities," McKay scoffs at the critic's assumption that poetry is a function of race and sexuality. McKay's general response is to deconstruct the notion of civilization by drawing attention to its foundations on slavery: "Now it seems to me that if the white man is really more civilized that the colored . . ., then the white man should take Negro poetry and pugilism in stride, just as he takes Negro labor in Africa and fattens on

it" (89). By arguing that great literature can originate in heterogeneous roots and sources, McKay goes on to challenge preoccupations with the "bugaboo" of the "African's sex" that infiltrate critical readings of Negro poetry. Born of an Arab chieftain and a Negro mother, Antar is a great Moroccan poet that McKay equates with the troubador wandering of the folk: the "Arab poets and musicians were the original troubadors" (90). Eager to place Antar alongside other "progenitors" of great poetry, McKay writes that "Antar is as great in Arabian literature as Homer in Greek" (90). Making the point that the canons of literature are constructions and not natural, he argues that in "the universal white system of education the white school boy learns about Homer and Virgil and their works, even if he does not read Greek and Latin. He learns nothing of Antar, although it is possible that European poetry derives more from Antar than from Homer" (90).

McKay, then, represents the folk in conjunction with the educated and he maps out and explores that space of ambivalence in between. It is in this space of liminality that writing originates; and it is through this ambivalence that he articulates a theory of meaning-making as indeterminate. McKay may associate the black working class with essentialist characteristics, but he then goes on to problematize his own totalizing rendering of the folk. For McKay, the folk are a people who can be found a long way from home. The folk provide a concept of origins that reveal that the roots (of meaning, self, and writing) are never singular, never self-identical. The

working class romanticized by McKay can be found in Russia, America, and North Africa. Moreover, while they are associated with a certain primitive, creative, and anonymous energy that McKay believes is necessary to the writing of literature, they are also a source of energy that needs to be paired with education.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks On A Road*

Unlike the vanguard of black cultural nationalist movements, Hurston uses folk religion as a source of writing itself.[6] Like *A Long Way From Home*, *Dust Tracks On A Road* is not an example of unmediated self-disclosure, a revealing of a life through language. Rather, it is a strategic construction of a life, a revelation that subjectivity is both a product of, and an agent which produces, language. As the title of her autobiography reveals, Hurston is a traveller who leaves dust tracks on a road. Her travelling, moreover, is instigated and motivated by folk religion and culture. When she is a child, she has such a lust for wandering that her mother fears that a woman "who was an enemy of hers had sprinkled travel dust around the doorstep the day I was born" (22-3). Not only is conjure used to explain Hurston's wandering as a child, but it also explains the motivation of her wandering as an adult: she travels as an anthropologist to record folk culture and religion. The dust tracks that Hurston leaves on the pages of her autobiography do not map a straight path: like the folk saying she is fond of

repeating, Hurston often hits a straight lick with a crooked stick. The reader must trace Hurston's presence through her absences, must read through the clues in order to track down what meanings she encodes in her text, for there is nothing straightforward or consistent about Hurston's representation of herself. As recent critics have determined, Hurston consciously misrepresents certain aspects of her life--she lies about her age and her birthplace. Even without knowing fully the details of Hurston's strategies of deception, earlier critics noted that her autobiography reads as a particularly evasive narrative. Robert Hemenway, Hurston's biographer, for instance, has commented that "[s]tyle . . . becomes a kind of camouflage, an escape from articulating the paradoxes of her personality" (xxxviii). What he does not note, however, is that her strategies are meta-fictional and self-reflexive. *Dust Tracks* draws attention to itself as a constructed text, as a process of signifying that is not fixed in any essential truths or meanings. In her chapter on love, for instance, Hurston disavows everything she has just written: "pay no attention to what I say about love, for as I said before, it may not mean a thing. It is my own bathtub singing. Just because my mouth opens up like a pray- book, it does not just have to flap like a Bible. And then again, anybody whose mouth is cut cross-ways is given to lying, unconsciously as well as knowingly" (192). Unlike the writers of the Negritude movement and the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston uses folk religion to conceive of a writing that is in

constant movement, a process that undercuts any essentialist assumptions she herself might make about race and class.

Hurston's autobiography, clearly, is anything *but* a text which poses as transparent and unstrategic. Hurston is a woman who literally studies Vodun; she is also metaphorically a Vodun writer--who obscures as much as she reveals, who uses the magic of the word as a transformative power to mediate and create reality.[7] Francoise Lionnet argues that it is more useful to read *Dust Tracks on a Road* as autoethnography than autobiography--the former is a term in keeping with Hurston's own "avowed methodology as essayist and anthropologist" (99). Rather than a representation of past actions, autoethnography is the "defining of one's subjective ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis; in short, . . . a kind of 'figural anthropology' of the self" (Lionnet 99). As an autoethnographer, Hurston not only records the folk, she herself is a product of a folk community, culture, and religion. In the first line of her autobiography, for instance, she announces that the geography of her self is mapped onto the contours of her home town. She writes that like "the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went in to make me. Time and place have had their say" (1). She continues, "you will have to know something about the time and place I come from, in order that you may interpret the incidents and directions of my life" (1). And indeed, as Lionnet points out, Hurston tells us about the town and culture that produced her, but she allows the folk culture of a

community to reveal information about her. Big Sweet says, "You ain't like me. You don't even sleep with no mens . . . . I think its nice for you to be like that. You just keep on writing down them lies" (189). Hurston, in other words, reveals that her subjectivity is not an ahistorical, apriori product, but rather a process shaped by history, culture, and community.

Hurston's subjectivity is shaped by the contingencies of folk community and culture; and, more specifically, her writing and life are inspired by the magic of folk religion. She conceives of folk religion as an originary source for her own writing and creative ability. In Hurston's own mythology, she was not more than seven when she was visited by twelve supernatural images which predicted and directed her life. These images acted as the blueprint and the catalyst for her life and her writing. She writes,

> I do not know when the visions began. Certainly I was not more than seven years old. . . . I saw a big raisin lying on the porch and I stopped to eat it. There was some cool shade on the porch, so I sat down, and soon I was asleep in a strange way. Like clearcut stereopticon slides, I saw twelve scenes flash before me, each one held until I had seen it well in every detail, and then be replaced by another. There was no continuity as in an average dream. Just disconnected scene after scene. I knew that they were all true, a preview of things to come, and my soul writhed in agony and shrunk away. But I knew there was no shrinking, these things had to be. (41)

As literary critic Barbara Rodriguez points out, Hurston doubles as a kind of Alice in Wonderland who eats a raisin and descends into a world of vision, dream, and magic.[8] Unlike Lewis Carroll's version, however, there is no shrinking in this story. Hurston does not enter into wonderland, but into a land which is as real as a front porch in Eatonville. In keeping with conjure's stipulation that the supernatural is, in fact, real, Hurston's visions make true predictions which must eventually come to pass. She will be orphaned, homeless, and betrayed--and she will become a writer. Magical visions thus dictate the direction of her life and provide a model upon which her life-story is based.

Hurston's magical visions are not only predictions of the future, they are "commandments" (43). She may be an Alice in Wonderland figure, but she is also addressed by a divine voice. She tells us, "the voice said No. I must go where I was sent. The weight of commandment laid heavy" (43). If, as Pryse and Spillers have argued, American Puritan literature imagined that the divine authority of God legitimized their writing, Hurston makes a similar but simultaneously subversive claim for the authority of her writing. The voice of commandment that Hurston hears might be the voice of the Christian God--but it also might be one voice of the many Vodun loas. She both mimics and subverts traditional concepts of the transcendental authority of logos in her fiction, as well as in her autobiography. She even transforms Moses from the writer of God's divine word into a Vodun doctor par excellence in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. In

Mules and Men, yet another autobiographical account of her anthropological research, she represents Moses both as Vodun doctor and writer. The two activities appear to be intertwined; magic appears to be a form of creation and writing. She writes, "The snake told him God's making words. . . . Moses made a nation and a book, a thousand million leaves of ordinary men's writing couldn't tell what Moses said" (184-85). She merges the logocentric power of the word with a syncretic, subversive slave culture and in this way undercuts the sense of the divine origin of truth and meaning. If Moses' ability to write appears to border on the patriarchal and logocentric power of the word, she quickly adds that the "Queen of Sheba was an Ethiopian just like Jethro, with a power unequal to man" (*Mules and Men* 185).

Hurston uses conjure to destabilize Christian notions of the logocentric word and also, at a more specific level, to challenge patriarchal and Eurocentric notions about the hegemonic canon of great literature. Her dreams are placed between discussions of canonical literature. Before telling us of her magical visions, Hurston mentions her love of Norse tales, Hans Christian Anderson, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Following her visions, she takes consolation in other writers who have also been visited by dreams, such as columnist O.O. McIntyre and Rudyard Kipling. She states, "Years later, after the last [vision] had come and gone, I read a sentence or a paragraph now and then in the columns of O.O. McIntyre which perhaps held no special meaning for the millions who read him, but in which I could see through those slight revelations that

he had had similar experiences. Kipling knew the feeling for himself, for he wrote of it very definitely" (43).[9] In this chronology of narrated events, Hurston literally places conjure at the center of a literary tradition--her magical visions are narrated *after* her mention of Anderson and Stevenson and *before* her mention of McIntyre and Kipling. In such a metonymic fashion, the placement of her magical visions disrupts the authority of European literature and representation--it interrupts the flow of authors listed by the narrative. She uses an oral folk religion to problematize, and to be included within, a traditionally exclusionary writing tradition.

Conjure enables Hurston to challenge racism in the dominant white culture and also the patriarchy of black folk culture. Her representation of conjure, in other words, not only stands as a rebuke to the Western (white) tradition of the written word, but also to black and white mens claims about patriarchal access to the authority of the word. In her autobiography, Hurston first dreams her conjure visions on the porch of her house--a space which revises the representation of the porch at Joe Clarke's store. On this store porch, the "menfolks" hold lying sessions and create their own form of oral literature. The full range of life is represented through folk tales told on the porch. She writes, "there are no discrete nuances of life on Joe Clarke's porch. There was open kindness, anger, hate, love, envy, and its kinfolks, but all emotions were naked, and nakedly arrived at. It was a case of 'make it and take it'" (46). "Naked" appears to be the operative word here.

Not surprisingly, it is a word used in reference to women's bodies. The porch is a patriarchal place where men hold lying sessions, evaluate women's bodies, and discuss ruined female virtue. However, Hurston revises the androcentric meanings of folk culture. As a child, "naturally," she is not allowed to sit around, but she does trespass and "drag her feet going in and out" (46). She enacts her greatest subversion, however, by unobtrusively shifting the power of semiotic authority and staking her claim to the story-telling place: she dreams her dreams of conjure and writing on the porch of her house--a liminal place between inside and outside, private and public. Hurston's dream porch revises the logocentric space of Joe Clarke's porch, for her dreams predict and promise her future access to writing and storytelling.

Hurston locates herself firmly on Joe Clarke's porch and at the center of a folk tradition--she is a complex writer who situates the authority of writing in numerous places. As a conjure writer, Hurston takes up certain ideological positions only to subvert and undercut them later on. She certainly problematizes her own relationship to community and folk tradition. She depicts herself in (albeit subversive) relationship to the community and Joe Clark's porch, but she also envisions herself as the ultimate autonomous subject who stands outside and above all relationship to people. Folk religion may inspire her writing (and thus locate her writing in a larger reality of past and community), but conjure also allows Hurston to rise above the community, to step outside time, and

to inhabit the lonely but chosen role of the gifted heroic writer. She writes about her visions,

> I never told anyone around me about these strange things. It was too different. They would laugh me off as a story-teller. Besides, I had a feeling of difference from my fellow men, and I did not want it to be found out. . . . I consider that my real childhood ended with the coming of the pronouncements. True, I played, fought, and studied with other children, but always I stood apart within. Often I was in some lonesome wilderness, suffering strange things and agonies while other children in the same yard played without a care. I asked myself why me? Why? Why? A cosmic loneliness was my shadow. Nothing and nobody around me really touched me. It is one of blessings of this world that few people see visions and dream dreams. (43)

While Hurston's supernatural visions place her in a larger community of folk culture and expression, they also allow her to transcend this community--to become the quintessential outsider-writer who stands above society. She presents herself as an outsider, as one who is different because of her ability to write. Hurston thus inhabits a contradictory space that problematizes concepts of a monolithic community. Her visions may tie her to an historical community, but they also allow her to inhabit the position of the objective writer who stands outside society in order to gain knowledge. As her language reveals, she positions herself as a chosen one, different from others, suffering strange agonies while others live without

responsibility. Her cry "why me? Why? Why?" reveals both self-absorption and individualism.

This insider/outsider, autonomous/historical role that Hurston occupies can best be understood through the image of the conjure woman. As much contemporary fiction of the African diaspora tells us, conjurers both worked for and within the community. But while they were often revered, they were also feared by others. In Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, for instance, the conjure women are fundamentally mysterious and solitary characters who are simultaneously respected and kept at arms length by the community people. In keeping with this tradition, Hurston is a conjure woman insofar as she stands both inside and outside the community. As a writer and anthropologist, she is not immediately accepted by others. When she first comes to Eatonville to collect folktales, she is unsuccessful for she does not speak the correct language. She asks in "carefully accented Barnardese" "Pardon me, but do you know any folk-tales or folk-songs?" (128). It is only on her second attempt that Hurston successfully gathers folk tales in her home town. In this way, Hurston portrays herself as the ultimate two-headed doctor, for she speaks a doubled language and occupies layered space.

Hurston uses her doubled position as writer and conjure doctor to articulate a theory of representation. At first she tells us that she hopes to document folk culture and religion in impartial and impersonal ways. Intending to represent folk

culture "objectively" and to follow the model of Franz Boas, she refers to anthropology as a "spy-glass" through which she can observe folk culture in an all-seeing and all-knowing fashion (127). But she complicates this stance of objectivity considerably. Hurston's ability to gather information in accurate ways, in fact, proves to be a function not of her scientific impartiality, but of her subjective familiarity with the culture. In this way, Hurston problematizes not only the notion of objectivity, but so too of accuracy. She tells us that the only way to recognize an accurate version of a folk song is to have previous knowledge of the song. She tells us,

> Once they got started, the 'lies" just rolled and the story-tellers fought for a chance to talk. It was the same with the songs. *The one thing to be guarded against, in the interest of truth, was over-enthusiasm.* For instance, if a song was going good, and the material ran out, the singer was apt to interpolate pieces of other songs into it. The only way you can know when that happens, is to know your material so well that you can sense the violation. Even if you do not know the song that is being used for padding, you can tell the change in rhythm and tempo. The words do not count. The subject matter in Negro folk songs can be anything . . . . The tune is the unity of the thing. And you have to know what you are doing when you begin to pass on that, because Negroes can fit in more words and leave out more and still keep the tune better than anyone I can think of. (144; emphasis mine)

In this, one of the most complicated and contradictory passages in her autobiography, Hurston appears to suggest that songs have an original form which the anthropologist must somehow recognize--that the anthropologist must guard against the violation of essential forms. On the other hand, Hurston suggests that the songs have no singular or fixed essence, and that they change with each performance. Lionnet helpfully clarifies the ambiguity by identifying the two subject positions inhabited by Hurston. Lionnet argues that "as an anthropologist [Hurston] feels that it is important to make those kinds of distinctions; yet she recognizes that for the singers the question is unimportant. The song goes on; the participants collectively 'keep the tune' and do not worry about the singularity or inviolability of a given text or song" (106). In an anthropologist's versus a writer's world view, in other words, there are different criteria for evaluating art and cultural forms. Distinguishing the practical concerns of the two disciplines, Hurston makes a point about the "boundaries" of texts and intertexts even while she recognizes the "futility of such conceptual distinctions and how severely limiting it is to try to establish the 'true' identity and originality of the subject matter" (Lionnet 106). This doubled undercutting, this movement between contradictory ideological stances, is an example of Hurston's conjure writing that calls attention to itself as a process of movement and change.

Hurston's passage directs us to the futility of conceptual distinctions between truth and falsity in regards to her own

autobiography--that is, we as readers cannot tell when Hurston herself overenthusiastically pads the "song" of her ethnography or autobiography. There are many instances in which Hurston makes reference to her own writing as doubled and opaque language. In *Mules and Men*, Hurston once again draws attention to the gaps and absences between the many roles she must inhabit. She writes of the difficulties in gathering folklore:

> the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries. (2-3)

Hurston must navigate a complex terrain between her role as anthropologist and native insider. While recognizing that she must document folk culture and religion, she knows very well that secrecy is an important part of folk religion. She tells us outright in *Mules and Men* that Vodun is "bound in secrecy . . . [and] believers conceal their faith. . . . The profound silence of the initiated remains what it is" (185). How, then, can she be the objective anthropologist "I" while at the same time being part of the secretive folk "we"? Her diction draws attention to the impossibility of keeping the boundaries between subject

positions intact. In the aforementioned passage, she moves from a third-person singular pronoun to a first-person plural pronoun--from "the Negro" and "his" to "us" and "we." Through a shift from "his" to "we," she shows that the objective stance of the anthropologist "I" is not an autonomous, static, or uninvolved position. By enacting a slide from a so-called objective stance to a subjective one, she destabilizes notions of absolute knowledge, draws attention to the discursivity of subject positions, and exposes the mediating nature of language.

In a final passage in *Mules and Men*, Hurston makes evident the way that she negotiates the boundaries of her subject position. Writing herself into the narrative as a character in a folk tale, she metafictionally maps herself as a writer who must straddle the divide between anthropologist and native, between bourgeois writer and member of folk community. She makes reference to the folk story of Sis Cat:

> Once Sis Cat got hungry and caught herself a rat and set herself down to eat 'im. Rat tried and tried to get loose but Sis Cat was too fast and strong. So jus' as de cat started to eat 'im he says, "Hol' on dere, Sis Cat! Ain't you got no manners atall? You going set up to de table and eat 'thout washing yo' face and hands?"
>
> Sis Cat was might hongry but she hate for de rat to think she ain't got no manners, so she went to de water and washed her face and hands and when she got back de rat was gone.

> So de cat caught herself a rat again and set down to eat. Si de Rat said, "Where's yo manners at, Sis Cat? You going to eat 'thout washing yo' face and hands?
>
> "Oh, Ah got plenty manners," de cat told 'im. "But Ah eats mah dinner and washes mah face and uses mah manners afterwards." So she et right on 'im and washed her face and hands. And cat's been washin' after eatin' ever since.
>
> I'm sitting here like Sis Cat, washing my face and usin' my manners. (245-46)

The folk story about the Cat is an ambiguous one. Having just written the book (having just used her manners), Hurston implies that she is akin to Sis Cat. But whom has she just "eaten"? The story might imply that Hurston has consumed Negro folktales for her own benefit and to appease her own hunger. The story might also imply, however, that Hurston has just eaten or tricked the reader. The story suggests, in other words, that she uses a "native" technique of feather-bed resistance. It appears, in this passage, that Hurston dismantles the problematic notion of the native Vodun informer and challenges the possibility of transparent language. Using a strategy of secrecy, she "reports" the facts about folk culture but also obscures and changes the complete "truth." As she reports, the Negro claims that the white man "can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind" (3).

In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston draws attention to the mediated and magical nature of writing and language. By foregrounding the constructed nature of representation, she destabilizes notions

about knowledge as objective. She writes that research "is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein" (127). At first, she appears to suggest that objective research can penetrate to the heart of reality and culture--that the essence and cosmic secrets of the universe can be known. She links this ability to penetrate cosmic secrets to her posed role as autonomous and objective writer. When she stands alone as a god-chosen writer, a "cosmic loneliness" is her "shadow" (43). Later, however, Hurston denies that cosmic secrets or universal essences may ever be known. She writes, "I find I know a great deal about form, but little or nothing about the mysteries I sought as a child" (201). She points out, in other words, that reality cannot be known in any absolute way--that reality is not transparent. In a rebuke to Enlightenment philosophers' attempts to prove the existence of God, she writes: "I do not pretend to read God's mind" (202). She destabilizes her own pose of autonomous objective writer with a follow-up comment about the subjectivity of perception and existence. She writes that "[n]othing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person. That is natural. There is no single face in nature, because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle. So every man's spice box seasons his own food" (45). In typical fashion, Hurston again takes a widely-varying stance on the system of representation in order to undercut the binary

oppositions of insider/outsider and to demonstrate that no knowledge is ever absolute.

Hurston's use of folk religion problematizes a theory of writing and language as unmediated and unconstructed. This is not to say that she does not sometimes adhere to essentialising and dehistoricized concepts of the folk. It is true that she spends her life documenting and recording the history of folk religion and culture and thus upholds the importance of remembering tradition. But at times she also ascribes to a notion of an authentic black culture that needs to be documented before it is lost to the ravaging effects of technology and migration. As literary critic Hazel Carby points out, Hurston associates the folk with a static, prelapsarian (or at least pre-urban) existence in rural communities. Similarly, in her theories of race, Hurston sometimes gestures to an ahistorical consciousness. She writes that "I see nothing but futility in looking back over my shoulder in rebuke at the grave of some white man who has been dead too long to talk about . . . . [M]y ancestors who live and died in it are dead. The white men who profited by their labor and lives are dead also. I have no personal memory of those times, and no responsibility for them" (206-7). But Hurston's comment is perhaps more about the importance of viewing one's self and culture with a sense of wholeness and a lack of bitterness than it is about apolitical and historical existence. Certainly, she challenges the notion of racial essences. She writes that subjectivity and race are functions of historical contingencies: "My interest lies in what

makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Circumstances and conditions have the power to influence, yes. Inherent difference, no" (151). Thus while Hurston at times points to a concept of a raceless ideal, at other times her writing, with its magical twists and turns, undercuts its own assertions and, in a performance of its own conjuring act, exposes the malleability of meanings and the constructedness of signification.

Both McKay and Hurston, then, use the folk in order to posit a theory of writing and language as constructed and historical--albeit to different degrees. In their deployment of folk religion, they engage in a writing as movement, one that undercuts even its own meanings. McKay's work begins to point toward the potential of folk heritage as a source of creativity. In particular, it is Hurston who acts as a conjure writer who legitimizes the authority of folk religion as a source of writing, creativity, and meaning-making.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1]Gates, lecture notes for "The Tradition of African-American Literature," Harvard University, spring semester, 1997.

[2]Certainly, Locke, Wright, and Baraka, for instance, have recognized the creativity and "authenticity" of folk expression and viewed it as an appropriate subject of literature.

[3]During the 1930's many African and West Indian writers were in close contact with Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Claude McKay. See Kesteloot.

[4]For criticism on Claude McKay, see John F. Callahan's "A Long Way From Home": The Art and Protest of Claude McKay and James Baldwin"; Geta LeSeur's "Claude McKay's Marxism"; Carolyn Cooper's "Race and the Politics of Self-Representation: A View from the University of the West Indies"; and Emmanuel S. Nelson's "Black Folk Ritual in *Home to Harlem* and *Black Thunder*." See also Addison Gayle's *Claude McKay: The Black Poet at War*.

[5]I am indebted to Michael Cooke's article "Claude McKay and V.S. Reid: The Simple Way to 'Magical Form'" for drawing my attention to this passage in *Banana Bottom*.

[6]Francoise Lionnet's "Autoethnography: The An-Archic Style of *Dust Tracks on a Road*" was extremely helpful to my work insofar as it helped me to locate and understand the many ambiguities of meaning and culture that exist in Hurston's autobiography. For an opposite perspective that focuses upon Hurston's inscription of fixed and static concepts about race and culture, see Hazel V. Carby's "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston." Other useful studies are Pamela Glenn Menke's "'The Lips of Books': Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" and D.A. Boxwell's "'Sis Cat' as Ethnographer: Self-Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*" which examine the intersections between ethnography and authorship. (The former is particularly illuminating insofar as Menke argues that the depictions of authorship in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* act as a feminist revision of the essentialist representation of creativity in *Mules and Men*.) For scholarship that explores Hurston's role as literary foremother, see Dianne Sadoff's "Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston"; Pearlie Peters's "Women and Assertive Voice in Hurston's Fiction and Folklore"; Alma S. Freeman's "Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker: A Spiritual Kinship"; Alice Reich's "Pheoby's Hungry Listening"; and Hortense Spillers's "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love." For comparisons between Richard Wright and Hurston, see June Jordan's "On Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston" and Gunter H. Lenz's " "Southern Exposures: The Urban Experience and the Re-Construction of Black Folk Culture and Community in the Works of Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston."

[7]Her tenacity in gathering folk culture reveals a trail-blazing and visionary approach to the representation of folk culture. She went to remarkable and unusual lengths to document the rites and rituals of folk religion and to initiate herself as a Vodun priestess in New Orleans. She writes, "I lay naked for three days and nights on a couch, with my navel to a rattlesnake skin . . . . I ate no food in all that time . . . . I began to dream strange exalted dreams . . . . [M]y finger was cut and I became blood brother to a snake" (*Mules and Men* 140).

[8]Paper presented at the Du Bois colloquium by Barbara Rodriguez, Department of African-American Studies, Harvard University, October 1996.

[9]Unlike McKay, who refers to Kipling in the most negative and disparaging terms, Hurston does not appear to take any overt issues with Kipling and his work.

Chapter 3

Representations of History in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*

> Our house stood within a few roads of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in the purest white, so delightful to the eye of the freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition.
>
> *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 293.

> Sometimes after working the hotels for visitors, or when I was drying out from whiskey or a piece of two-dollar tail, I would sneak off to the waterfront, and there, sitting on the rain-leached pier in heavy, liquescent air, in shimmering light so soft and opalescent that sunlight could not fully pierce the fine erotic mist, limpid and luminous at dusk, I would stare out to sea, envying the sailors riding out on merchantmen on the gift of good weather, wondering if there was some far-flung port, a foreign country or island far away at the earth's rim where a freeman could escape the vanities cityfolk called self-interest, the mediocrity called achievement.
>
> *Middle Passage*, 4.

In his comparison of the "purest white" sails of a ship to "so many shrouded ghosts," Frederick Douglass creates out of folk religion's affirmation of the existence of ghosts a metaphor of freedom that contrasts cruelly with his condition of enslavement. He imagines that the ghostly sails of the ship inspire delight to the "eye of the freemen" but terror to the eye of the slave (293). He cries, "You are loosened from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! . . . O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! (293-4). More than a century later, Charles Johnson engages in what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls an African-American rhetorical strategy of

signifying--that is, repetition with a signal difference. In Johnson's *Middle Passage*, the protagonist Rutherford Calhoun is similarly confronted by a ship as an image of freedom. He sits at port and envies the sailors their freedom. Later, he stows away unknowingly aboard a slave ship destined for Africa. His ship proves not to be a ghostly metaphor of freedom, but a magical metonym of the history of slavery in the New World. Representing the ship as a space for the American nation, Johnson plots his fictional ship in historical relationship to the Transatlantic Passage, colonization, and slavery. The protagonist Rutherford's ill-conceived metaphor of the ship as an ahistorical sign of freedom is soon overturned and replaced by his own personal history and experience on a slave ship. Unlike the European narrative of the New World as a pristine place of opportunity and new beginnings, Rutherford's ship experience draws attention to another story--to that of African-Americans' alternative narrative about America as a place of oppression and violence. The sails of the ship might be white, but they are hardly "pure" (to use Douglass's description)--they are propelled by a capitalistic exploitation of black people.

In opposition to this falsely universal nation of ships as signs of freedom, many African diasporic writers plot ships as signs of enslavement. Both Charles Johnson and Guyanese writer Wilson Harris represent a magical ship as an historical space for the nation.[1] For both writers, the magic of folk religion is associated with journeys and ship voyages; that is, magic becomes a metonym for movement, change, and dynamic process.

Harris's *The Palace of the Peacock* tells the story of deceased crew members who return from the dead to sail to the interior of Guyana; they are led by Donne, who sails to find a magical tribe of Arawak "folk" and colonize their land. Johnson's *Middle Passage* tells the story of a black freedman who stows away on a slave ship carrying a magical tribe of Africans and their captured deity; mutiny breaks out on the voyage back from Africa and three characters "die" and are magically reborn. In both novels, the crew members are transformed by their search for and interaction with these magical tribes.[2] Wise and ancient, these peoples teach the Westerners, colonizers, and slave traders about the inclusive and dynamic nature of history--which allows them to experience a mutuality of human experience described by Harris as "the unity of being" and Johnson as "intersubjectivity." Lest teaching the "truth" to the woefully ignorant colonizers smack of mysticism and exoticism, both Harris and Johnson dismantle "otherness" by associating magic with a syncretic and heterogeneous history. The folk and the Allmuseri contain all peoples, histories and cultures; they include, for instance, both the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. Inverting and playing with the concept of static native origins, Harris and Johnson represent the folk and Allmuseri as peoples created not through race but through values, not by nature but by collective discourse.

In this chapter, I examine how Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* use folk religion to create a concept of history for the Third World.

While, as I argued in the previous chapter, Claude McKay and Zora Neale Hurston deploy folk religion to articulate a theory of writing, they also inscribe ahistorical and essentializing notions about race and class. Harris and Johnson, on the other hand, use folk religion to represent a concept of history that challenges dominant assumptions about the static nature of origins and cultures. Black texts not only resist dominant Eurocentric discourses, but black narratives as well. For this reason, I read Harris's and Johnson's novels in context of black nationalist discourses. Wilson's novel (1960) revises the assumptions of the Negritude movement and Johnson's novel (1990) rewrites the ideology of the Black Arts movement. Borrowing their concepts of history from colonizing discourses, the Negritude and Black Arts writers stabilized African origins and native cultures as essentialized products; they assumed or hoped that history was a thing that could be recuperated from beneath the layers of colonialism. Harris and Johnson stand in parallel, albeit delayed, revision of homogenizing nationalist movements in the Caribbean and African America. They realize that history does not stand still; it is not transported to the New World as a cultural artifact, but it changes on the Middle Passage to incorporate the parameters and conditions of the New World. Harris and Johnson represent the syncreticity of Vodun to posit that native culture is never pure, that it is an inflection of history. Thus Johnson is to the Black Arts movement what Harris is to the Negritude movement. As a challenge to cultural nationalisms' attempts to articulate essential sites of

blackness, both writers represent the magic of folk religion to historicize origins and nationhood.

Reconstructing Black Nationhood Through Folk Religion

Whether it be in the form of black music or folk religion, black culture has occupied an important role in black nationalist movements' resistance to the forces of colonialism. As Frantz Fanon points out in *Wretched of the Earth*, colonialism strips the subordinate group of its history and culture in a dehumanizing and disempowering process. In his discussion of the Negritude movement, he writes that colonialism

> has never ceased to maintain that the Negro is a savage; and for the colonist, the Negro was neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian, for he simply spoke of "the Negro." For colonialism, this vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticisms, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals--in short, the Negro's country. . . . The contention by colonialism that the darkest night of humanity lay over pre-colonial history concerns the whole of the African continent. (211-2)

The efforts of the native to rehabilitate himself and "to escape the claws of colonialism are logically inscribed from the same points of view as that of colonialism" (212). Fanon tells us that the native intellectual "who has got it into his head to

proclaim the existence of another culture never does so in the name of Angola or of Dahomey. The culture which is affirmed is African culture" (212). The Negro, "never so much a Negro since he has been dominated by the whites," decides to prove that he has a culture by demonstrating "that a Negro culture exists" (212). He realizes that a history "points to a well-defined path: to Negro culture" (212).

In this logical manner outlined by Fanon, the proponents of the Negritude movement decided to prove the existence of a Negro culture in terms borrowed from the dominant discourse. The Negritude poets of the 1930's and 50's represented Vodun, masks, drums, griots, dolls, priests, and priestesses as proof of an African racial essence and history. This focus on folk religion was especially true in Haiti, where Vodun had been long a focus of nationalist sentiment. Certainly, Vodun preoccupied the political and artistic imagination of the Haitians, at least since Vodun doctors Boukman and Makandal instigated the Haitian revolution that lasted from 1792 to 1804. Later on, the American occupation from 1915 to 1934 led to an increased awareness and interest in Vodun. In nationalist response to foreign occupation, Haitian poets formed a cultural coalition called Les Griots and claimed that Vodun was a "mysticisme nationale." They argued that folk religion and culture were of utmost importance to the development of national pride. Carl Brouard, editor of *Revue des Griots*, argued that "[we] must study our folklore with passion . . . [since] to ignore one's history is to risk the loss of racial genius" (Kesteloot, 26-27).[3] So too Jean Price-

Mars, Haitian physician and diplomat, advocated the importance of African-based pride in local culture. In *Ainsi Parla L'oncle*, Price-Mars claimed that Haitian folklore, Creole dialect, and Vodun were the "bedrock" upon which "the race could rebuild the inmost feelings of its genius and the certainty of its indestructible vitality" (20; cited in Kesteloot, 27). He continued to argue: "Our only chance to be ourselves is to repudiate no part of our ancestral heritage. For eight-tenths of us this heritage is a gift from Africa" (210; cited in Kesteloot, 27).

The Negritude movement reached its heydey in the 40's and 50's, but by the early 60's was viewed as a failure among black intellectuals, as they began to realize that its proponents conceived of blackness as an ahistorical and undifferentiated essence. At "The First Congress of Negro Artists and Writers" in 1956, James Baldwin was one of the first black intellectuals to criticize the Negritude movement. For Baldwin, the African-American experience was a unique one that could not be reduced to a racial African presence which repeated itself without distinction across the diaspora.[4] Following Baldwin's example, Haitian intellectuals Rene Depestre and Jacques Stephen Alexis opposed the notion of a universal black experience and an internationally undistinguished history. They did not believe that history was static, nor that the slaves' experience in the New World was devoid of the creative and transformative arts of the imagination. They claimed Vodun was not proof of an African past, but an example of the dynamism and fluidity of a Caribbean

past and present. As critic Michael Dash points out, the failure of the Negritude movement

> can be almost explained by the single fact of its conception of historic circumstance as so potentially destructive that the inheritors of such a past of slavery and colonization are frozen into a prison of protest. It is a notion of history inherited from those who conquered, in which the survival of the suppressed and the subdued were never truly taken into account. (64)

The Negritude movement, in other words, borrowed its terms and concepts of history from the dominant ideology and it enacted its resistance to this ideology by merely reversing them. If the dominant group claimed that Negroes had no form of essential history, the Negritude poets retaliated by arguing that they did have history--a history evident in the static and essentialized African survivals of folk religion.

Other writers countered the essentializing tendency of the Negritude movement by using Vodun to articulate a philosophy of history as fluid and dynamic in opposition to the concept of history as static and fixed. For example, in "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," Wilson Harris writes that a "philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of imagination . . . on limbo or vodun, on Carib bush-baby omens, on Arawak zemi, on Latin, English inheritances" (24-5). According to Harris, Vodun represents a "dialogue" with history and multiple cultures--it represents change, process, and creativity. As he points out in "A Talk on the Subjective

Imagination," there are two kinds of relationships with the past: "one which *derives* from the past, and one which is in profound *dialogue* with the past [one which asks impertinent questions of the past]" (63). The distance between Africa and each New World, he argues, is "not to be equated with a uniform sum" ("Myth" 25). Limbo and Vodun act as gateways between the old and new, between Africa and the Caribbean ("Myth" 26). In the same way that slaves' bodies contorted to fit the small confinement of the ship, so too the meanings of culture and beliefs changed to fit the confinements of the New World. Harris writes that "*[l]imbo* then reflects a certain kind of gateway or threshold to a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles. It is--in some ways--the archetypal sea-change stemming from Old Worlds and it is legitimate, I feel, to pun on limbo as a kind of shared or phantom limb" between Africa and its diaspora ("Myth" 26). Limbo is not the "total recall for an African past" ("Myth" 26). Rather, it is "the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures" ("Myth" 27). He continues to note that limbo is related "to Haitian *vodun* in the sense that Haitian *vodun* (though possessing a direct link with African *vodun* . . .) also seeks to accommodate new Catholic features in its constitution" ("Myth" 27). He distinguishes between African and Haitian Vodun in this way: "African *vodun* is a school of ancestors: it is very conservative. Something of this conservative focus remains very strongly in Haitian vodun but there is an absorption of new

elements which breaks the tribal monolith of the past and re-assembles an inter-tribal or cross-cultural community of families" ("Myth" 33).

According to Harris, writers should turn away from realism, which "has consistently broken those links [of the imagination] by making passive creatures of the very earth on which we move" (*The Radical Imagination* 78). Literature should be a function of the arts of the syncretic imagination and the arts of memory, which should cull from various cultural sources, such as European and African cultures, scientific and literary sources, past and present traditions. Harris posits a concept of "profound re-visionary capacities within and through the creative/recreative address in which Imagination resides" (*The Radical Imagination* 87). He sees in this syncretic imagination restorative and regenerative potential. He writes that the "balance, the creative and re-creative balance between cultures, requires an enormous penetration of tradition. It is a penetration of tradition which lays open tradition in a totally new way" (112). The "rhythm of a narrative," he continues, "deals with the way . . . partial visions overlap. In that overlap lies an intuitive potential that may allow us to revise our vision of the state, our vision of reality, our vision of civilization" (113). As he puts in *Womb of Space*, "the unity or density of original expression, in a work of profound imagination, is paradox: it is both a cloak for, and a dialogue with, eclipses of live 'otherness' that seek to break through in

a new light and tone expressive of layers of reality." (Introduction to *Womb of Space*).

Negritude critics and writers are not the only ones to focus on folk culture as a source of blackness; so too African American writers look to folk culture to articulate a concept of essential blackness--although critics generally focus on black music. Harris's response to the Negritude movement is akin to Charles Johnson's response to the Black Arts movement. For Charles Johnson, the Black Arts movement is a child of Negritude--the latter constituting a retreat from history and the plurality of meaning. He writes that Negritude marked a movement away from "ambiguity, the complexity of Being occasioned by the conflict of interpretations, and a flight by the black artist from facing a universe silent to its own sense" (20). But Negritude, argues Johnson, nonetheless exerts its influence in the 1970's and 80's on black literary production (20). He names Amiri Baraka as "the most important single figure in contemporary black arts and letters for the theoretical development of Negritude after Cesaire and Senghor" (20).

Black Arts poets, like Baraka, strive to articulate a concept of blackness that informs art and literature--but it is an ahistorical concept of blackness that brooks no change or dynamism. Unlike Haitian Negritude poets who turned to Vodun, Black Arts poets turned to music. For Baraka, blues and jazz became the source of true or serious literary creativity. In "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature,'" Baraka argues that the problem with Negro literature lies in its imitation of white

middle-class literature. It is only in African-American music, and in what he calls the "popular traditions" of the so-called lower class Negro, that the conditions of art fulfill the basis for human life. Blues and jazz "have been the only consistent exhibitors of 'Negritude' in formal American culture simply because the bearers of this tradition maintained their essential identities as Negroes" (165-6). In no other art, he claims, "has this been possible" (165-6). Thus blues and jazz are, for Baraka, essentially American cultural forms. For Baraka, blackness has an inherent quality--an argument that gives credence to Johnson's assessment that the Black Arts movement conceives of meaning as essentialized and static. As Johnson writes, the Black Arts movement merely reverses the negative meanings imposed on the black body: "'It is beautiful,' you might say, 'I am a child of the Sun'" (28).

According to Johnson, black writers need to incorporate new forms such as the genre of the ghost story and the tradition of folk religion. Black American fiction, Johnson continues, previously was mired in "naive assumptions" about the ability of language to record reality and experience.[5] New experimental forms are needed to challenge naturalist meanings. He points out that Black Arts poets have embraced the problematic forms of realism and naturalism--*unlike* the Negritude poets who experimented with almost mystical form. Neglecting such writers as Hurston and Ellison, for example, the writers of the Black Arts movement resurrected the naturalism of Richard Wright as the model for writing (due to his "appropriately" overt

political impetus). The representation of magic, in all of its forms including the classic ghost tale and subversive practice of slave folk religion, provides African-American writers with an imaginative source through which to articulate a concept of history as transformative, history as writing. Johnson writes that "black fiction could benefit greatly from the revitalizing influences of cross-cultural fertilization. . . such as the *fabliau*, the classic sea story, the utopian novel, and a galaxy of other forms that are our inheritance as writers" (52). One of these forms is the folk tale which inscribes magic into the narrative. He writes: "The dead *must* rise, we notice in the Tale, because justice is unquestioned in this form and demands that a murdered person seek revenge on his killer, even beyond the grave. And so the dead walk. Angels intercede in human affairs. The logic of the heart holds the Tale together, *fusing realism and fantasy in often profound gifts of the imagination*" (50, emphasis mine). Fiction's fusion of the realism and fantasy in gifts of the imagination creates what Michael Dash refers to as a counter-culture of the imagination. Like the victims in the Tale who demand justice, so too subordinated peoples demand retribution--they do so through a fusion of realism and fantasy in profound gifts of the imagination.

Johnson argues that new forms are needed in black literature. Popular wisdom, he informs us, has it that "direct experience" is the "raw stuff of creative writing" (30). Countering this attitude to writing, he depends on Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology and history.[6] In *Being and*

Race, Johnson explains that, for Husserl, "experience" is not a quantifiable commodity, not something that merely happens that can be accumulated objectively. Husserl's brand of phenomenology, rather, asserts that experience is known and in fact produced through perception; he focuses on the role of the imagination in the perception of reality.[7] Following the ideas of contemporary French poststructuralists, Johnson states that writing does not imitate or represent experience--rather it "*creates* that experience" (6). "Nature," in fact, "gives us no metaphors" (6). But, as Johnson hurriedly assures us, he does not subscribe to a philosophy that writing has no relation to the "real" world. He does not agree that literature illuminates no window "onto the world of real men, real women, or real events," nor that it reveals "nothing except its own proliferating mechanisms, feeds on nothing except the fuel of the its own logical possibilities as a game" (34-5). Rather, for Johnson, there is a workable middle ground. He writes that "language is transcendence. And so is fiction" (39). The term "transcendence" might appear problematic in the context of Johnson's ideological project, but by this term he means that language allows us to move out of the prison of ourselves, to live in relationship to others. In the words of Merleau Ponty, he argues that writing "is the trespass of oneself upon the other and of the other upon me" (*Being and Race* 39). The writer who cannot see language as a way to transcend the solipsism of relativity commits suicide. To read "is to inhabit the role and real place of others" (39). Language and writing are ways, for

Johnson, to achieve the transcendence of being--that is, to intersubjectivity.

Through the concepts of the unity of being and intersubjectivity, Harris and Johnson expose the multiple histories that underlie the national discourses of Guyana and America. By focussing on the arts and gifts of the imagination, both writers adhere to a philosophy of being that challenges the colonizing discourse of self versus other--a discourse which facilitates and justifies the practice of slavery. As literary critic Gay Wilentz points out, we should not confuse their philosophy of unity or intersubjectivity with concepts of universality.[8] The latter concept of universality, as Wilson Harris puts it, is based on a "homogeneous imperative that often masks or conceals from us the heterogeneous roots of a community" --it is a totalizing gesture that effaces difference and otherness ("A Talk on the Subjective Imagination" 63). The former concept of unity, however, embraces heterogeneity and highlights cross cultural discourses. Both these writers, then, use folk religion to yoke together a sense of writing and history, to conceptualize a dynamic sense of signification and meaning. As Harris puts it, folk arts provide us with the possibility of breaking free from "the apparently real world or the prison of history" ("Myth" 24). And, Johnson points out, the representation of magic is needed for some "things simply cannot be said or shown through the tradition of realism as we inherit it" (48).

Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*

In *Palace of the Peacock,* Wilson Harris represents folk religion as a counter-culture of the imagination that is fluid and creative.[9] It is represented as a philosophy of history that changes and liberates all who encounter and embrace it. In the novel, a crew of sailors travels to the interior of Guyana to re-live its first voyage. Each member of the crew, as we discover, has already died and returns to life in an endless repetition of power and desire. Returning from the dead, the crew appear to live in accordance with a Vodun "ancestral and twin fantasy of death-in-life and life-in-death" (25). But, preoccupied as they are with a logic of colonialism, they have no knowledge of their ancestors, the past, or Vodun. They are without a philosophy of history, caught within an isolating ideology of destruction and oppression. It is only when they meet the folk, a magical, community-oriented, historical tribe, that the crew members learn to situate themselves in history and to renounce their colonizer's ideology. The folk are represented not as the "other" or the "colonized," but as an inclusive syncretic culture that contains all ideologies, all discourses, all cultures.

At the beginning of the novel, the crew are defined by their distance from the folk: they are far from a Vodun philosophy of the unity of being. They are imprisoned within their endless cycle of death and rebirth, colonization and oppression. In the novel's opening scene, the nameless-narrator

recounts a dream figured in an inverse iconography of Vodun--a dream that establishes the tone of the novel and the crew's mindset.[10] In the novel's first section entitled "Horseman, Pass By," the nameless-narrator dreams that a horseman with a "devil's smile" appears on a road "at a breakneck speed" (13). In the dream, "a shot [rings] out suddenly" and strikes the horseman dead (13).[11] The reference to the horseman locates the narrator's dream both within Western literary and Caribbean folk religious traditions.[12] This first section of the novel opens with an epigraph comprised of three lines from Yeats's "Under Ben Bulben" wherein the nationalist poet ostensibly writes his own epitaph: "Cast a cold eye/ on Life, on death/ Horseman, pass by."[13] The allusion to Yeats's poem draws attention to key issues in the novel, such as the role of writing or authorship in the articulation of national discourses, the role of culture and art in counter-discursive resistance, and the nature of history and time, as is alluded to by the reference to the horsemen of the apocalypse. The nameless-narrator's dream is also located in a folk religious tradition and it alludes to Vodun possession rituals. In Haiti's Vodun ritual of possession, a human host is "mounted" by the loa and is referred to as a "horse." In this version of the ritual, the protagonist Donne usurps the position of the loa and he himself becomes the horseman. Inverting the traditional sequence of Vodun possession, he wants to ride, not to be ridden. He wants to become spirit himself, divine and supreme. His is an act of supreme egotism and the dream foretells his tendency to lead the

crew in their desire to dominate others and to conquer alternate cultures. In typical patriarchal fashion, the crew's quest for dominance manifests itself through their desire to possess the figurative body of a woman named Mariella--Donne's Arawak lover, who is also described as a horse the crew feels they must ride. The nameless narrator tells us, "Mariella was the obsession we must encounter at all costs" (24). All the crew members are united by the search for her: the "crew has come . . . to fulfill the one self-same early desire and need in all of us" (25). The nameless-narrator has another dream that Mariella is a beast that "the devil himself must fondle and mount" (46). The colonizer's ideology, based on the desire to rule, to dominate, to annihilate the other, is best summed up by Wishrop--who symbolizes for the crew the desire "to kill whatever they had learned to hate" (65).[14]

Harris depicts folk religion as a form of salvation from a colonizing ideology that only leads to sterile death. The chance for the crew's redemption lies in magic, in ghosts--in the acceptance of the fluidity of history. As Donne puts it, "There is a ghost of a chance . . . [of] [c]hanging my ways" (56). The folk themselves contain, embody, and enact the magic necessary for redemption. Mariella, for instance, is a magical woman who can appear as many things: as young and as old woman. She is not only a woman, but also a symbol for the folk. More than herself, she embodies the all-encompassing, unifying characteristics of the folk. She moves between multiple subject positions and incarnations of herself. Unlike the crew's pointed desire to

conquer, Mariella has "an all-inclusive manner that still contrived to be--as a duck sheds water its wings--the negation of every conquest and of fear--every shade of persecution" (72). As a figure for the folk, she stands as an incarnation of many peoples rather than a racial, biologically-specific clan; in the folk are "drawn and mingled the pursued and the pursuer alike, separate and yet one and the same person" (72). While the narrative problematically uses the female body as a symbol for sexual other, it refuses to allow Mariella to occupy the position of the native or racial other. The folk appear to be "other," but their "otherness" proves to be a site of heterogeneous collectivity. In opposition to the hegemonic racialism of the Negritude movement, Harris shows that there are no unitary *racial* origins. He refuses, that is, to allow the folk to be typecast according to the colonizer's binarized ideology of otherness (although he does not problematize his use of the female body as a "womb of space").

By learning to speak the Vodún language of the folk, the crew learns to inhabit history and space. Harris uses Vodun imagery to depict the counter discourse of the folk in terms of water--in terms of a magical sea language. In Haiti, the loa are said to live across the water. Haitian proverbs say that "Haiti is the child of Dahomey" and that "Haiti is the child of Ginen" (or Guinea). As religion scholar Joseph Murphy points out, "Ginen lies over the great waters, and it is a memory of crossing waters that underlies the liturgy of vodou" (38). Associated with water, the folk speak a language of fluid

meanings. The transformative potential of history is depicted through its association with water--with the history of the Middle Passage and its historical significance as change and transformation. Harris contrasts the fluid water of Vodun philosophy with the fixed land of colonizer's ideology. At first, the crew cannot speak a Vodun water language and they adhere to a discourse that transforms process into product, people into things, places into colonized land. As the nameless narrator tells us, the "names of Brazil and Guyana were colonial conventions I had known from childhood. I clung to them now as to a curious necessary stone and footing" (20). The nameless-narrator stands upon his inherited ideas and languages as though standing on fixed land or universal truth. He adheres to colonized meanings that are in reality constructed conventions attempting to pass as natural truths: "I knew I was dreaming no longer in the way I had been blind and dreaming before. . . . I stood on my curious stone as upon the reality of an *unchanging* presence" (25, emphasis mine). The language the crew speaks is associated with "clear fictions of imperious rock," dangerously protruding from the river they navigate (32). But as Johnson tells us, "nature gives us no metaphors"--and certainly not unchanging ones. The imperial rocks of the narrator's reality are engulfed by the water's force. Appropriately enough, the water is associated with the language of the folk; their language and words are the river itself. Harris writes that the "sudden dreaming fury of the stream was naught else but the ancient spit of all flying insolence in the voiceless and

terrible humility of the folk" (73). Mariella's dress is the stream: the "ruffles in the water were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew" (73). The crew's language of fixity is both contrasted with, and yet at the same time contained by, the folk's language of fluidity. The two are not opposites; they do not comprise a self-other, inside-outside dichotomy. The crew exist within the language of the folk, whether they know it or not. Harris writes, "the whole crew were blasted and rooted in soil of Mariella like imprisoned dead trees" (55).

The crew members learn to reposition themselves in history not only by learning to speak the language of the folk, but also by immersing themselves in the water of the folk--by experiencing a Vodun baptism.[15] The crew members position themselves in dialogue with other histories when they lose their boat and enter the river, when they ascend the waterfall. Harris writes that their "vessel had struck a rock" (100). They see that it "was the bizarre rock and vessel of their second death" (100). Bringing them a kind of "unendurable self-knowledge and discomfort," the rock which they strike is not the "transparent" rock of imperialism, but a rock which reveals the fictions of history (101). As Harris writes: "the past returned to him like pure fictions of rock" (84). Having hit a rock of history, the crew's relationship to power then changes: "They were the pursuers and now they had become the pursued" (106). As they come closer and closer to discovering the folk, the crew die one after the other--only to be reborn in the home of the folk. They come to a waterfall along a rock face and the remaining crew

members climb the waterfall. Donne notices that "steps and balconies had been nailed with abandon from bottom to top making hazardous ladders against the universal walls" (129). The waterfall leads them to a larger sense of history and their place within it--to an understanding of the unity of being which is not the false Eurocentric philosophy of universality that assumes that the experiences of the white man of property constitutes common experience, but rather to a philosophy which embraces cultural differences and religious otherness. In the first room in the waterfall, Donne sees a carpenter Christ figure. As he continues to climb, he sees a second room inhabited by a female figure--Mariella with a child--who is both the Madonna and Arawak mother. Each new level of his ascent brings him death, rebirth, and self-revelation. When he reaches the top of the waterfall, Donne sees an enormous tree of "lightning flesh" wearing a "starry dress" (146). Soon, the stars become "peacock's eyes" (146). The nameless I-narrator realizes that he has come to "the palace of the universe" and to self-knowledge (146). He looks around and sees the faces of the crew members in each window of the palace. He states, "In the rooms of the palace where we firmly stood--free from the chains of illusion we had made without--the sound that filled us was unlike the link of memory itself. It was the inseparable moment within ourselves of all fulfillment and understanding" (151).

In this novel, Harris inscribes his theory of Vodun as a phantom limb between Africa and the Caribbean through his representations of the bodies and limbs of the crew that undergo

a sea change. The crew's journey upriver points to transformations of culture, being, and meanings that occur in the passage between Old World and New World. In keeping with Harris's theory of Vodun as a phantom limb connection between Africa and the Caribbean, the crew members are physically reconfigured in relationship to history after they interact with the folk. The crew's discovery of the folk enables their limbo connections between self and other, between past and present. In the opening of the novel, the narrator describes Donne as having a "dead leg and limb" (14). When Donne finds his way into the palace of the peacock his feet "are truly alive" for the first time, despite the fact that he has died yet again (145). With his new and "alien" body, he starts to "walk at last." Looking through the window of life and seeing "a full and invisible meaning," he "knew that [his] hands and feet were formed and supported at this instant" (145). Donne's revised relationship to history allows him to reject his previous colonizing ideology. As Donne says,

> Now he knew for the first time the fetishes he and his companions had embraced. They were bound together in wishful substance and in the very enormity of a dreaming enmity and opposition and self-destruction. Remove all this or weaken its appearance and its cruelty and they were finished. (123)

While his language is still not devoid of a colonizer's vocabulary (he clearly uses the term fetish as the worshipping of "false gods"), Donne does give up an either-or language

oppression. His interaction with folk leads him to reposition his body in relation to others. Relinquishing his desire to colonize others' land, he realizes that his previous life of colonization had been a hell, but that he "had come home at last to the unflinching folk" (143). Harris writes, "It flashed on him looking down the steep spirit of the cliff that this dreaming return to a ruling function of nothingness and to a false sense of home was the meaning of hell" (130).

Once having stumbled into the house of folk, then, the crew members are able to find their own home, their selves, and their place in the universe. The folk are a syncretic people that, as Maes-Jelinek point out, are the crew's true, if not actual, ancestors. As Maes-Jelinek points out,

> the end of the novel confirms that it has been a search for an 'other' which is also part of oneself. It also confirms that the creation of consciousness is necessarily a dialogue, an awareness of reciprocity between the self and the manifold shapes of creation, which partake of the same source and move abreast with the self . . . The 'other' is as fluid and dynamic as the self and would in turn become oppressive if idealized or confined to a timeless order. (*The Naked Design*, 57)

The search for a Vodun philosophy becomes not a search for a specific, cultural practice that is essentially African or even Haitian, but rather a search for a philosophy of syncreticism. The religion and cosmology of the folk are plural, constructed

discourses that reveal the connections and relationships between people, cultures, histories.

Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*

I set up *Middle Passage* as a companion piece to *Palace of the Peacock* for its startlingly similar depiction of folk religion as a philosophy of the unity of being and the heterogeneity of history.[16] Like *Palace of the Peacock*, Johnson's novel inscribes a magical tribe. While the folk in Harris's novel are notably Arawak, African, and European, the magical tribe members in Johnson's novel are comprised of Africans, African-Americans, and Europeans. In *Middle Passage*, Rutherford Calhoun, a freed black man, stows away on a slave ship to Africa.[17] Not only does the captain transport a magical African tribe called the Allmuseri in the ship's hold, but so too does he crate and store the Allmuseri god in the recesses of the ship. The Allmuseri adhere to a religion of intersubjectivity--a concept of the interrelatedness of existence and the unity of being everywhere. The Allmuseri are an inclusive culture: once they were "a seafaring people" who "blended" with the numerous civilizations they encountered across the world (76). They are "a clan-state, as close-knit as cells in the body" (58). The ideology of tribe incorporates everything, everyone, everywhere. The Allmuseri god "sustains everythin' in the universe. . . . It is the heat in water, they say. The wetness in water" (100). They do not speak its name,

for it "has a thousand names" (101); nor do they carve its image, for all "things are its image: stone and sand. Master and slave" (101). Their vision of Hell is "the failure to experience the unity of Being everywhere" (65).

Like Harris, Johnson portrays a subversive philosophy of history through his use of Vodun water imagery. He associates the magic of the Allmuseri with the fluidity of water and the ambiguity of language. Johnson suggests that the Allmuseri do not speak a realist language, but rather an "unnaturalized" one which is paradoxically close to nature. It is a "peculiar," "gnomic" language which, contradictorily, is associated with both land and sea, both grass and ocean. When they speak, "it was not so much like talking as the tones of the savannah made at night, siffilating through the plains of the coarse grass, soughing as dry wind from tree to tree. Not really a language at all . . . as a melic way of speaking from the diaphram that dovetailed articles into nouns, nouns into verbs" (77). Johnson depicts the language of the Allmuseri in similar ways to Harris's inscriptions of the language of the folk--a poststructuralist, fluid, water language. When one Allmuseri called Ngonyama talks, "it was as if the objects and others he referred to flowed together like water, taking different forms, as the sea could now be fluid, now solid ice, now steam swirling" (77). Like Derridean writing, Allmuseri meaning is created in conjunction with and relation to the signifiers around it. When reading their written language, Rutherford must learn to "look at the characters . . . as you would an old

friend you've seen many times before, grasping the meaning--and relation to other characters--in a single intuitive snap" (78). Personalized in this way, language becomes an intersubjective act among friends. It is not an aggressive language; Rutherford cannot run his eyes across their written language without feeling everything inside him relax (77). Refusing to differentiate noun from verb, subject from object, self from other, their language reveals their respect for the existence of others. Rutherford tells us that in the Allmuseri language "the predication 'is,' which granted existence to anything, had over the ages eroded into merely an article of faith for them" (77). It is a language which challenges the very conditions of slavery. The notion of property, object, and commodity is absent from their vocabulary. Rutherford reports that "[n]ouns or static substances hardly existed in their vocabulary at all" (77).

Portrayed as a subaltern whose voice is "overdetermined" (to use Spivak's term) by the dominant ideology, Rutherford has not yet learned to hear or emphasize the accents of his speech which are inflected by the nuances of counter-cultural discourse. He may be quick to recognize the fluidity and ambiguity of the language of the Allmuseri, but he is not so agile in his own linguistic ability and he speaks a language of ahistorical and indeed cliched meanings. While the Allmuseri speak a language which is both land and sea--both "siffilating through the plains of coarse grass" and "flow[ing] together like water"--Rutherford speaks a land-bound language whose meanings

need to be cracked open by the magical words of the Allmuseri. Although he is an outlaw and a thief, he speaks a static language of received conventions. Looking out from port, he romanticizes the sea but he cannot incorporate the fluidity of its dangerous meanings. In a language of cliched masculinity, for instance, Rutherford announces to his reader that of "all the things that drive men to sea, the most common disaster . . . is women" (1). He claims to detest the bourgeois values of the middle class and their philosophy of consumption. But his thieving proves to be no more than a copy of its ideology of commodity gratification. He tells us: "I hungered--literally hungered--for life in all its shades and hues: I was hooked on sensation, you might say, a lecher for perception and the nerve-knocking thrill, like a shot of opium, of new 'experiences'" (3). On the ship the Republic, the true nature of thievery as a commodity discourse comes to light. The ship's cook Josiah Squibb states: "I've *seen* some things, laddie. Reason I look so bad is 'cause I've been living" (38). Squibb's statement gives Rutherford pause and a moment of self-revelation: "Like Captain Falcon, like me . . . he seemed to hunger for 'experience' as the bourgeois Creoles desired possessions" (38). Although Rutherford might believe himself better than the bourgeois, "too refined to crave gross, physical things," he is akin to them insofar as he "heaped and hived 'experiences' instead . . . as if *life* was a commodity, a *thing* we could cram into ourselves" (38). Rutherford, clearly, merely inverts the larger framework of the dominant order; he is a thief who adheres to the same

philosophy of acquisition as do the bourgeois. He too speaks an ahistorical language that transforms process into product.

Ironically, Rutherford learns to inflect his voice with the meanings of counter-cultural discourse in a place overdetermined by the dominant discourse. He stows away on a slave ship called the Republic--a place where people and their cultures are transformed into commodities to be sold for profit. Johnson's Republic is an ironic invocation of neo-Platonic ideals. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates banishes all but a few artists from the Republic, arguing that artists and writers depict false representations of reality, mere shadows of the ideal forms. Only those artists who "write hymns and praises" can be admitted (*Being and Race* 6). Most artists may not be allowed in Plato's Republic, but Johnson's ship-republic is ruled by a captain who steals art and who writes naturalized meanings about domination, power, and self-glory in the ship's log.

A corrupt writer of half-understood Platonic ideals, Falcon writes naked "in order to free himself up"--that is, he makes a one-to-one correspondence of literal reality with writing (94). Nakedness denotes for him freedom and naturalness--as though one would have a unmediated influence upon the other. His mimetic writing is also based on a composite philosophy of Hegelian dialectic thinking. He adheres to a colonizer's ideology of binary oppositions, through which the self can only be actualized by the negation of the other. He claims that the ship's problems are larger than the mere individuals who board

and sail it. Rather, "mankind is the problem. . . . Not just gents, but women as well, anythin' capable of *thought*" (97). For Falcon, conflict is a state of mind. He states that dualism

> is a bloody structure of the mind. Subject and object, perceiver and perceived, self and other--these ancient twins are built into the mind like the stem-piece of merchantman. We cannot *think* without them, sir. . . . They are signs of a transcendental Fault, a deep crack in consciousness itself. Mind was *made* for murder. Slavery, if you think this through, forcing yourself not to flinch, is the social correlate of a deeper, ontic wound. (98)

If Falcon believes in transcendence, then, it is only in a transcendental fault in human thinking. He is caught in a prison of naturalistic thinking in which "only he is real to himself" (95). Unable to experience the transcendence of writing or subjectivity, Falcon is the kind of writer who is "locked" within the prison of himself: a condition that Johnson believes "is a kind of suicide for a creative writer" (*Being and Race* 44). Indeed, Falcon enacts his static and limited existence in the narrative by literally committing suicide.

While the captain may commandeer a fixed language while alive, however, he does not commandeer an ahistoricized ship. True to life, the dominant discourse cannot control the production of meaning and discourse in a hegemonic way. The ship itself conspires to destabilize the meanings which Falcon inscribes. Although America may be infected by a national amnesia about slavery, although it may not acknowledge

subordinate cultural practices, the nation is, in fact, a plural, heterogeneous space of competing discourses and histories. Called the Republic, the ship carries both African and Euro-American cultural discourses, thus revealing the cross-cultural constructions of history underlying nationhood. Johnson portrays the ship as a remarkably subversive place that refuses to remain historically homogeneous, as the captain would like. It is a place where the notion of culture, writing, and representation are revised. Rather than product, the ship is "from stem to stern, a process" (36). Constantly being rebuilt while at sea, the ship is not a place self-identical with itself; it "would not be . . . the same vessel that left New Orleans" (36). Moreover, Johnson uses the ocean to point to the revisionary, unstable nature of language; the ship floats "on that thrashing Void called the Atlantic" (36). Challenging the fixity of land-locked meanings, the ocean is a "formless Naught" and a "bottomless chaos" (42). It is a magical space that lies beneath the naturalized surface of reality and meanings--a place which destabilizes the smooth contours of reason.[18]

The Atlantic crossing is not only associated with a kind of magical fluidity that destabilizes fixed meanings, it is also personified as a conjurer. Although the god is crated, it refuses to remain imprisoned and its magic acts as a catalyst for change. As one crew member McGaffin claims "I know trouble when I see it. Them niggers is weird. A tribe of witches and strangelings. They kin *do* things" (84). To paraphrase the words of McGaffin, the Allmuseri religion has the ability to *do*--to

change reality. After picking up the Allmuseri and their god, the ship is buffeted by a strange and unnatural storm. The sea, as Rutherford tells us, was "hot with anger, running in ranges like the Andes or the Rockies, and be damned if I didn't see forks of blue lightning in the topgallant sails" (80). The storm is akin to a "conjurer" who plays "trick[s]" on the ship (81). In combination of conjuration and Christianity, the magic of the conjurer is compared to the power of Moses. When the ship swings around to face the west, "plunging" as "if into Hell," water columns break over them to the height of the crosstrees--"two solid walls on either side, held still as when Moses parted the Red Sea" (81). In a moment of magical retribution, the sea passes judgment on the ship's crew. The whole crew becomes religious--however momentarily. Rutherford tells us that "we all clapped out hands together as one company--thirty-two sopping-wet cutthroats black-toothed rakes traitors drunkards rapscallions thieves poltroons forgers clotpolls sots lobcoks sodomists prison escapees and debauchees simultaneously praying like choirboys" (82). The particularly interesting thing, however, is that Ngonyama remains dry--as though "he'd known the storm was coming" (83).

Johnson uses folk religion to expose the transformative nature of language and history. It is after this magical storm that Rutherford begins to learn to write and to speak, and therein lies his first steps to repositioning himself within history. The chaos caused by magic forces Rutherford to enter into a drama of fluid meanings, to enter a political arena of

language, and to experience how history shapes signification. The first lesson he learns is that of power relations. Stumbling upon crew members who plot mutiny, Rutherford finds himself entangled in a political drama of resistance and betrayal. The crew wants him to rebel against the captain, and the captain wants him to report information about the crew. One of the crew members, McGaffin, suggests they pin blame on Rutherford for the mutiny. McGaffin envisions Rutherford as a kind of inconsequential wanderer. He states,

> [o]nce we reach New Orleans the rest of us kin sign on to other ships, and Calhoun'll go his own way, like he's always done, believin in nothin', belongin' to nobody, driftin' here and there and dyin', probably in a ditch without so much as leavin' a mark on the world--or as much of a mark as you get from writin' on water. (88)

Although McGaffin thinks he insults Rutherford with his comments about driftwood and writing on water, he actually describes a liberating and empowering situation. Rutherford does, in fact, come to believe in something. While he may not walk on water, as it were, he does write on it. He literally writes at sea and figuratively writes a language that leaves no marks. Given the opportunity to write by the captain (who before his suicide bequeaths to him the ship's log, which ostensibly comprises the novel we are reading), Rutherford picks up the pen from Falcon but he does not mimic his penmanship. Rejecting the language of property, he writes a language which does not mark other bodies as mere chattel; he writes a water-language of fluid, hybrid

meanings. Rutherford comes to recognize that he cannot be complicitous in the system of slavery and that he must aid the rebellion. For example, he realizes that he cannot let Baleka (a young Allmuseri girl) perish, that he must help her.

Folk religion and magic help Rutherford to change his mind about the ahistorical nature of meaning--and, in particular, his romanticized concept about the essential otherness of African origins. It would be easy to assume that the Allmuseri represent pure African origins, but Rutherford learns the falsity of this assumption. Over the course of the ship's voyage, he turns into a better reader and revises his earlier opinions about the Allmuseri. On two counts he indicates that he has become a more reliable narrator than before. First he comments that the "more I thought on it, the Allmuseri seemed less a biological tribe than a clan held together by values" (109). Then, he states, "[s]tupidly, I had seen their lives and culture as timeless product, as finished thing, pure essence or Parmenidean meaning I envied and wanted to embrace, when the truth was that they were process and Heraclitean change" (124). After the meeting with the mutinous crew members, Rutherford's speech is affected. He begins to speak a strange and unconventional language. He tells us about Squibb, "[o]ne thing I liked about the cook was that he knew when to shut up even when he was *mubblefubbled* and dying to talk" (92, emphasis mine). He continues with this strange vocabulary, "[p]ersonally, I was too *pitchkettled* to trust my own speech" (92, emphasis mine). Both of these words, appropriately enough, are used in relation to speaking and to

language. They reveal a transformation in Rutherford's relationship to meaning--both in terms of reading and writing. When he becomes a writer, taking over the writing of the log, he gives up his belief in static meanings and essential products. His relationship to language changes, for he realizes the transformative potential of language. He writes, at the end of his harrowing ship voyage ordeal, "I found a way to make peace with the recent past by turning it into Word" (190).

The magic embodied by the Allmuseri god undermines concepts of blackness as an ahistorical essence.[19] It is only when Rutherford feeds the Allmuseri god and sees the history embodied in its contours that he learns to reposition himself fully in time and place and to relinquish a slavery mentality of otherness. He descends into the hold of the ship and sees the "dangerous, shape-shifting god of the Allmuseri" (167). This being delights "in divesting men of their minds" and manifests itself as Rutherford's father, fugitive Riley Calhoun. The god is "top-heavy. All head" (168). But it brings a knowledge which is more than simply head and mind. It affects Rutherford in such a way that he proclaims it "safe to say I was hardly in my right mind" (168). Undermining and parodying the Enlightenment focus on reason, the god's head brings to Rutherford an/other knowledge--a knowledge of magical transcendence which does not separate body from mind, self from history, Africa from America. As Rutherford says, "I could no more separate the two, deserting father and divine monster, than I could sort wave from sea" (168-9). Not only are they one, but the Allmuseri god and

African-American father combine in a sea language where wave blends with sea. The god is written by and speaks a water language which destabilizes a colonizer's discourse of fixed binary oppositions. By blending with Rutherford's father, the god proves itself to be more than itself--it achieves a state of intersubjective history and existence. Appearing within the god and "trapped like a ship in a bottle," Rutherford's father-within-a-god sends a message to Rutherford's isolated shipwrecked self and incorporates him in a larger reality of community and history (168). The god speaks like a griot--gradually unfolding a "seriality of images." Rutherford tells us that the god "could only recite by reeling forth the entire story of his people" (169). It could not "bring forth this one man's life without delivering as well the *complete* content of the antecedent universe to which my father, as a single thread, belonged" (169). It speaks, in other words, a language of generational unity and communal history.

Through his interaction with the magic of the Allmuseri god, Rutherford learns that race is a fluid and fictional product of history. He tells us that "phantasmal" nature of the god "forever confused [his] lineage as a marginalized American colored man" (169). Rutherford realizes that he is not only a discrete entity belonging to a certain time and place, but that he is simultaneously part of, and created by, a larger historical reality and cross-cultural currents. His being is redefined by the communal sea language spoken by the god/his

father. Rutherford hears the god utter and magnify the last sound his father made before dying. He tells us:

> A thousand soft undervoices that jumped my jangling senses from his last, weakly syllabled wind to a mosaic of voices within voices, each one immanent in the other, none his but all strangely his, the result being that as the loathsome creature, this deity from the dim beginnings of the black past, folded my father back into the broader, shifting field--*as waves vanish into water*--his breathing blurred into a dissolution of sounds and I could only feel that identity was imagined. (171, emphasis mine)

Rutherford hears, in other words, a transcendent language in which self and other are not separated by the boundaries. And by hearing this language, Rutherford realizes that the "(black) self was the greatest of all fictions" (171). By learning his own history, Rutherford learns about himself: "[s]uddenly I knew the god's name: Rutherford" (171). He realizes his role in the larger unity of self, language, history, culture, and nationhood. He knows himself as a fiction--a process of language and discourse.

Rutherford's relationship to history changes as a result of his interaction not only with West African religion, but also with Christianity. Through the knowledge of his fictionality, Rutherford changes in a profound way--he dies and is reborn, thus positioning himself in relation to Vodun and Christianity. As the narrative tells, in a remarkably offhand way, "[t]hen I fainted/Or died/Whatever" (171). When he awakes, his

resurrection takes on Christian overtones (like Harris' characters who are reborn in the Christian-Arawak palace of the peacock). He awakes to find Squibb feeding him the "choicest cut of ~~medium raw~~ *steak*," despite the fact that they have been adrift at sea for weeks with no food (171-2). As it turns out, he is eating the human flesh of the first mate, Peter Cringle. Like much else in the narrative, the cannibalism which occurs in the novel is an ironic reversal of stereotypical associations. Rather than an act associated with the savage "other," rather than an act attributed only to the most uncivilized people, the act of the first mate becomes one of ultimate self-sacrifice and Christian self-renunciation. He gives up his body so that he may save others. In this way, the act of cannibalism becomes something altogether different--an act ironically taking on implications of Christian Eucharist. Johnson's depiction of cannibalism pushes the notion of intersubjectivity to a new level by inscribing syncretic religious influences on identity. Cringle is not only the first mate: he is first, last, and all. By eating Cringle, the crew and captives are not only unified, they cut through class and race lines--for Cringle is an upper class, educated, white man who becomes the fodder upon which they all feed. They all prove to be interconnected in more ways than one. The Middle Passage thus proves to be a middle place indeed--a place where overlapping subjectivities, existences, cultures, and histories influence one another. The Middle Passage becomes a liminal place that acts as a metonym for the syncreticity of history and existence.

On the Middle Passage, everyone changes. The only crew member to survive the voyage, Josiah Squibb changes by his interaction with the Allmuseri. When we first meet Squibb he is a decrepit and degenerate man. A polygamist with five or six wives, Squibb is a man whose life's quest mimics Negritude's search for origins. He does not search for a *place* of origin, but rather for a *person* of unitary origins. His version of static history is embodied by the unitary body of a woman. As he tells Rutherford, "I keeps fallin' in love with the same kinda woman ovah and ovah again. They all look like my wife Maud--God rest her--when we first met" (39). Squibb is engaged in a "Sisyphean quest," a "quixotic, Parmenidean quest for beauty beyond the reach of Becoming," an "endless "seeking of a single woman's love" (39). The singularity (and impossibility) of his quest reveals itself in the condition of Squibb's body, which is wounded by his vision of Parmenidean and fixed meanings. We are told that his right foot is dead, that he is an alcoholic, and that he is slow and useless (38). Unlike the crew's pursuit of Mariella (who stands as a symbol of a syncretic culture) in Harris's novel, Squibb seeks a woman who stands only for another woman in Johnson's novel. Maud becomes the ultimate signifier of unitary origins--and also of Squibb's ultimate self-preoccupation. But like Rutherford, Squibb changes by his interaction with the Allmuseri and their god. Not only does he work relentlessly to help the others after the mutiny, so too he appears to give up his search for Maud. Rutherford suggests this idea to us: "It would have been helpful to know if he still

sought perfection in women who looked like his late wife" (176). Indeed, in his new-found concern for others, Squibb appears to take on some of the Allmuseri's magical abilities--he demonstrates concern for others and community. Rutherford comments upon the change in Squibb, the

> result of Squibb's sea change was that his touch, as he worked the lancet, reminded me of Ngonyama's . . . as if he could anticipate my pain before I felt it, and therefore move the other way. His breathing even resembled that of the Allmuseri, the proportion of inhalation, retention, and exhalation being something like 1:4:2., like oil flowing from one vessel to another. I felt perfectly balanced in the crosscurrents of culture in him. (176)

Rutherford and Ngonyama also change on the Middle Passage. The ship's magical process reveals the syncretic dynamics of history and the cross currents in culture. Bodies in Johnson's novel, like those in Harris's novel, literalize Harris's pun on the limbo as a "shared or phantom limb" between Africa and its diaspora. During the sea voyage, a number of limbs become transformed; bodies prove plastic mediums shaped by experience, culture, and history. Both Rutherford's and Ngonyama's hands are transformed. When Rutherford throws a body of a decomposing slave over the side of the ship, his hand is irrevocably changed by its contact with death and suffering. Just as he grabs the body, his "ragged, unmanicured nails" puncture "the meat with a hiss" (123). A "handful of rotting leg drop[s] into his hand"

(123). Rutherford ends up holding "that bloody piece of him . . .dark and porous" (123). Even when Ngonyama pitches the flesh overboard, Rutherford's "stained hand still tingle[s]" (123). Rutherford's limb is affected in permanent ways--changed by his limbo connection to Africa, and also by his American complicity in slavery. He tells us with alarm that his hand "no longer felt like my own. Something in me said it would never be clean again" (123). But Ngonyama's body is also changed by his interaction with America. As Rutherford writes about the Allmuseri, we "had changed them" (124). Just as Tommy's "exposure to Africa had altered him," so too "the slaves' life among the lowest strata of Yankee society--and the horrors they experienced--were subtly reshaping their souls as thoroughly as Falcon's tight-packing had contorted their flesh" (124-5). On board the ship, during the mutiny, Ngonyama's body takes on the Allmuseri connotations of what it means to be Rutherford--a thief. In their culture, the Allmuseri punish thieves by "lopping off a thief's right hand" (65). On board ship, the dogs tear off three of Ngonyama's fingers (131). In the end, his body is so distorted and changed, Ngonyama becomes like Rutherford and the ship itself. Rutherford tells us that Ngonyama "had lashed himself to the wheel and now could not break free. . . . [I]t was impossible to tell where ship ended and sailor began or, for that matter, to clearly distinguish what was ship, what sailor, and what sea" (183). Ngonyama forever becomes the process of sea and ship and Middle Passage.

The limbo changes in crew member, stowaway, and captive are not portrayed in the novel as homogenously idealistic changes for the better. The brutality of the Middle Passage reveals itself through images of violence, starvation, misery, mutilation, and madness. In the end, it is a strange and unholy trinity of characters who survive the Middle Passage. White crew member Squibb, African-American stowaway Rutherford, and Allmuseri girl Baleka are the only main characters to remain alive. They provide the cultural and historical bedrock upon which America builds itself. Through the relationship of Squibb, Rutherford, and Baleka, the novel puts forth a possibility of hope and life. Johnson plots their relationship in reverse relationship to any essentialist notions about mother Africa as a site of origins. Taking Baleka under his protection, Rutherford becomes a father-figure to the African girl, who stands metonymically as mother Africa. In a strange twist on Oedipal complex, America becomes father to mother Africa. Riffing on concepts of origins in cultural nationalist movements, Johnson's novel suggests that the fluidity of history and syncreticity of culture provide sites for rejuvenation, existence, and resistance.

Both Harris and Johnson revise the fundamental tenets of cultural nationalist movements. In the same way that Harris's work stands in revision of the Negritude movement, so too does Johnson's work challenge the Black Arts movement. Both novelists inscribe in their texts a vision of folk religion that points to

a concept of history as writing, a notion that signification is a fluid process that derives from numerous cultural elements.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1]Certainly these depictions of ship, voyages, and the sea are not limited to these two novels. The sea has captured the literary imagination over the ages. Both novelists evoke and rewrite canonical American and European sea narratives such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *The Nigger of Narcissus*.

Charles Johnson's novel, in particular, revises American sea narratives such as *Moby Dick* and *Benito Cereno*. In general, Melville's two novels represent the ship as a microcosm for America in order to examine the racial, cultural, gendered, economic, and personal forces which shape nationhood. In particular, Johnson's character Captain Falcon desires to control meaning, culture, race, and nationhood--a desire that resonates with Captain Ahab's quest for dominance over the endlessly deferred white whale (symbolizing the attainment of material wealth, the fulfillment of personal vengeance, and the possibility of transcendental signification, among other things). *The Middle Passage* can also be compared to *Benito Cereno* insofar as both novels deal with mutinies by slaves and the effects of slavery on nationhood.

Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* depicts a journey to the interior jungles of Guyana and human subjectivity; similarly, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* represents a journey to the interior jungles of Africa and the human heart. But while Conrad's novel reveals the heart of darkness that exists at the center of Africa and humankind, Harris's novel exposes the unity of being and heart of light that exists within Guyana and all peoples. (*The Middle Passage* also alludes to *Heart of Darkness*. But it does not exhibit the same idealistic vision of the heart of light at the center of the unity of being as does *Palace of the Peacock*. Rather, *The Middle Passage* revises *Heart of Darkness* insofar as the decay which exists at the center of European civilization is not exposed metaphorically by the African landscape, but rather literally by European oppression and colonization of Africa.) *Palace of the Peacock* alludes to the *Nigger of Narcissus* insofar as life and death become central themes inextricably bound to race and nationhood.

[2]I use this term 'tribe' for, while problematic, it is one used both by Harris and Johnson.

[3]Other magazines such as *Nouvelle Ronde* and *Revue Indigene* expressed similar philosophies about the African heritage of Vodun. See Kesteloot, 26-27.

[4]In particular, Baldwin challenged Senghor's analysis of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* by pointing out the insignificance of an African heritage to the novel. He writes, "For, if white classics existed, in distinction that is, to merely French or English classics, these could only be the classics produced by Greece and Rome. If *Black Boy* said Senghor, were to be analyzed,

it would undoubtedly reveal the African heritage to which it owed its existence; in the same way, I supposed, that Dicken's *Tale of Two Cities*, would upon analysis, reveal its debt to Aeschylus. It did not seem very important" ("Princes and Powers" 40; cited in Michael Dash's "Marvellous Realism," 57).

[5]For Johnson, a theory of writing is bound up with a theory of history. The genre of naturalist fiction, for instance, conceals "profound prejudices about Being, what a person is, the nature of society, causation, and a worm can of metaphysical questions about what could and could not logically occur in our 'experience' and conscious life" (6).

[6]Edmund Husserl's theory of imagination is important to a concept of phenomenology and it resonates with Harris's and Johnson's focus on the role of the arts of the imagination. In his study of the role of the imagination in the phenomenological project, Richard Kearney tells us that the phenomenological project, as it extends from Husserl to Heidegger, "invites us to think again, to go back to the beginnings, to question anew. This has the methodological advantage of enabling us to ask what things mean . . . We no longer take things themselves for granted" (5).

Phenomenology examines imagination insofar as it constitutes essential meaning. Husserl's philosophy of the imagination is a complex one. Kearney argues that three decisive claims made by Husserl evolve into hermeneutic disciplines: (1) imagining is a productive act of consciousness, not a mental reproduction in the mind; (2) imagining does not involve a courier service between body and mind but an original synthesis which precedes the age-old opposition between the sensible and the intelligible; (3) imagining is not a luxury of idle fancy but an instrument of truth. (6)

[7] According to Husserl, we must "set aside, all explanatory models for the phenomenon we investigate, thereby making possible an intuition of the essence or invariant structures of different experiences" (preface to *Being and Race*). In other words, phenomenology "is something you do"--it is a philosophy that stresses perception, interaction, creativity, and process. While Husserl's notion of atemporal "essences" may seem problematic, Johnson assures us that we may overlook it. It is unimportant, he writes, whether or not "we believe it is possible to disclose the atemporal essences of things, as Husserl hoped" (preface). What is truly important, he stresses, is Husserl's "method of bracketing and descriptively reporting what is given in any encounter with mathematical, fantastical, physical, or fictional objects" (preface). This bracketing is useful "for a first-person determination of what is before us, and for revealing what we, as culturally-conditioned subjects, have brought to each and every encounter with the world" (preface).

[8]Wilentz argues that "Wilson Harris, in his imaginative fiction, strives to break through the conventions of traditional Western thought to unmask what has been heretofore suppressed as a contradiction to the unified ideal. In his approach to

literature, Harris moves away from the concept of an absolute--rigid distinctions of subject and object, identity and non-identity--towards a mutuality in which all cultures share the burden of humanity" (56). See Wilentz's "Wilson Harris's Divine Comedy of Existence: Miniaturizations of the Cosmos in *Palace of the Peacock*."

[9]Some of the most comprehensive and useful criticism on Wilson Harris can be found in the work of Hena Maes-Jelinek. See *Naked Design* and *Wilson Harris;* also see "Charting the Uncapturable in Wilson Harris's Writing" and "Numinous Proportions: Wilson Harris's Alternative to All 'Posts.'" Also useful is Gregory Shaw's "Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris." Many other critics follow suit on the heels of Maes-Jelinek and provide close readings of the novel in context of Harris's own philosophical writings. See Timothy J. Cribb's "Toward the Reading of Wilson Harris"; Fernanda Steele's "Breaking Down Barriers as Genesis of a New Beginning in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*"; Vera M. Kutzinski's "New Personalities: Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Wilson Harris's Recent Fiction"; and Stuart Murray's "Postcoloniality/Modernity: Wilson Harris and Postcolonial Theory." Uwe Schafer's "'both/and' and/or 'either/or': Syncreticism and Imagination in the Novels of Wilson Harris and Bessie Head" and Gay Wilentz's "Wilson Harris's Divine Comedy of Existence: Miniaturizations of the Cosmos in *Palace of the Peacock* examine the imaginative syncreticism of Harris's fiction. For longer works that provide comprehensive studies of Harris see Sandra Drake's *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition: A New Architecture of the World* and Michael Gilkes's *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*.

[10]Victoria Toliver makes a similar point about Vodun imagery in the depiction of horseman. See Toliver's "Vodun Iconography in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*."

[11]For a discussion of the relationship between Donne and the nameless narrator, see Maes-Jelinek, *The Naked Design* 19-24; Drake 52 & 66; Gilkes 28.

[12]Gilkes also comments on the epigraph. He writes that "the *epigraph* from Yeats . . . [becomes] an *epitaph*, giv[ing] significance to the horseman of the passage as the 'pale rider,' Death or the horseman of the Apocalypse" (27).

[13]Yeats is a poet who has particular significance for the writers of the African diaspora--especially for the writers of the Harlem Renaissance who were inspired by his nationalism. Moreover, Harris's term the "unity of being" echoes Yeats's use of the phrase in "A Vision" and in his autobiography. Yeats's term refers to a philosophical and cosmological system wherein he posits neo-Platonic ideals about the unity of all being.

[14]Later Donne confesses that "I have treated the folk badly. . . I feel I am involved in the most frightful material slavery" (56).

[15]Raboteau writes that in "Africa, Dutch Guiana, and Haiti, possession by water spirits drives the possessed devotee to hurl

himself bodily into a stream, pond, or river" (*Slave Religion* 57).

[16]Traditionally, the French Caribbean writers (and their antecedent writers) have embraced alternative forms of writing--a fact that might explain the earlier incarnation of a marvellous realist narrative in Caribbean than in African-American literature.

[17]Criticism on *Middle Passage* is surprisingly scarce. Most useful are Ashraf Rushdy's illuminating articles "The Phenomenology of the Allmuseri: Charles Johnson and the Subject of Narrative of Slavery" and "The Properties of Desire: Forms of Slave Identity in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*." In "The African Sacrificial Kingship Ritual and Johnson's *Middle Passage*," Celestin Walby examines the depictions of African cultural rituals in the novel and argues that the Allmuseri are an amalgamation of Bambara, Dogon, and Egyptian religion and mythology. S.X. Goudie makes an interesting argument that traces the many meanings of the word "mark" in "'Leavin' a Mark on the Wor(l)d: Marksmen and Marked Men in Middle Passage." Daniel M. Scott II provides a good textual analysis of the plot, and especially the construction of subjectivity, in "Interrogating Identity: Appropriation and Transformation in *Middle Passage*."

[18]First mate Peter Cringle tells Rutherford, "Tis frightening to me sometimes . . . that all our reasoning and works are so provisional, so damned fragile, and someday we pass away like the stain of breath on a mirror and sink back into *that* from whence we've come" (42).

[19]Rutherford's interaction with the Allmuseri on this ship of process positions him in history--both in his family and in a philosophy of history. His change occurs slowly through the voyage. The shipboard mutiny forces Rutherford to act much like his brother did and to repeat his family history--which gives him a greater sense of compassion and self-understanding. Rutherford's brother ostensibly "betrayed" his brother by dividing the master's inheritance amongst all the slaves, thus depriving Rutherford of a larger share of the wealth. Rutherford "betrays" the mutiny by telling Falcon about it; later, however, Rutherford aids both the crew and slaves. The repetition of this "betrayal" offers Rutherford a certain knowledge of his brother--it also allows him to mimic his brother by rejecting a commodity discourse.

Chapter 4

Representations of Gender in Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

> Magnanimous Warrior! She in whom the spirits come quick and hard. Hunting mother. She who forages. Who knows the ground. Where the hills of fufu are concealed. . . . Obeah-woman. Myal-woman. She can cure. She can kill. She can give jobs. She is foy-eyed. The bearer of second sight. Mother who goes forth emitting flames from her eyes. Nose. Mouth. Ears. Vulva. Anus. She bites the evildoers that they become full of sores. She treats cholera with bitterbush. She burns the canefield. She is River Mother. Sky mother. Old Hige. The Moon. Old Suck
>
> What has become of the warrior? Now that we need her more than ever. She has burned up in the almshouse fire in Kingston. She has starved to death. She wanders the road of the country with swollen feet. She has cancer. Her children have left her. Her powers are known no longer. They are called by other names. She is not respected. She lies on an iron bedside in a shack in Trench Town. She begs outside a rumshop in Spanish Town. She cleans the yard of a woman younger than she. She lies in a bed in a public hospital with sores across her buttocks. No one swabs her wounds. Flies gather. No one turns her in the bed. The pain makes her light-headed. They tell her she is senile. They have taken away her bag of magic. Her teeth. Her goat's horn. We have forgotten her. Now that we need her more than ever. The nurses ignore her. The doctors make a game of her. The priest tries to take her soul.
>
> Can you remember how to love her?
>
> *No Telephone to Heaven* 164

In her novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, Michelle Cliff remembers Nanny, a conjure woman of astonishing power. Living with her brother Cudjoe in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, Nanny was an historical personage who organized Windward slaves against the English and who, when betrayed by a fellow rebel, was captured and killed in 1733.[1] Drawing upon myths surrounding Nanny's magical abilities, Cliff conjectures that Nanny "carried

the secrets of her magic into slavery," "prepared amulets and oaths for her armies," and "could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless" (*Abeng* 14). Cliff emphasizes the relationship between the conjure woman's body and her magical abilities, cataloguing her empowerment and demise through her physical well-being. When in possession of her bag of magic, the woman warrior is the "bearer of second-sight"; she goes forth "emitting flames from her eyes. Nose. Mouth. Ears. Vulva. Anus." When her magic is taken away from her, her "buttocks" are covered with "sores"; she has "cancer," "swollen feet," and is "light-headed" (14). In other words, her body deteriorates when the dominant discourse discredits her mode of power, when it takes away her "goat's horn." Notably, her body grows sick when the dominant patriarchal group asserts its own power and effaces that of Jamaican folk religion: not only does Western technology in the form of doctors and nurses disregard her, so too does Christianity in the form of the priest who tries to "steal her soul" (14).

Not all contemporary Caribbean and African-American women writers depict the magical warrior as a guerilla fighter who shoots flames from her various body parts. Contemporary writers, however, generally do represent root doctors as subversive subjects, as women of power, and as community leaders.[2] In the past thirty years, black women writers such as Michelle Cliff, Erna Brodber, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison, and Paule Marshall have increasingly turned to folk religion and magic to portray the power of the female

ancestor and to expose the ways that sexuality and bodies have been constructed through socio-policitical discourses. Magic provides an excellent example by which black women writers can remember and represent the power of the female ancestor. Although Myal, Obeah, Vodun, Hoodoo, and Revival traditionally are practices that both men and women wield, folk religions have provided black women with avenues of power, artistry, and self-expression that were otherwise denied them. To African-American women writers, as to none before, conjure, with its magic, divination, and root work, provides a form of literary resistance to dominant configurations of race, gender, history, and nation.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Wilson Harris and Charles Johnson represent folk religion as a trope for a philosophy of history in the African diaspora. They inscribe in magico-religious practices a didactic purpose: magic teaches male characters how to inhabit syncretic and fluid spaces of self and nation. But while their representations of folk religion challenge nationalist conceptions of essentialist meaning and unitary origins, Harris's and Johnson's inscriptions of Vodun do not take into consideration the intersections of race and gender. Their representations of folk religion do not leave women much room to maneuver in history. Their (ghost) ship-republics are populated by men. In Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, the crew members sail to find Mariella (the only female character in the novel), who acts as a trope for the "folk" itself. Upon the gender of her body, the "womb of space" is

mapped. In Johnson's *The Middle Passage,* the main female character is Isadora Bailey who--in true stereotypical fashion--drives Rutherford Calhoun to sea. She is absent for the duration of the novel and only reappears at the end as a prize for Rutherford to claim: conveniently, Isadora has lost sufficient weight to become beautiful. Harris and Johnson may react against the essentialist discourses of earlier nationalist movements, but they do not make it their priority to expose the ways that patriarchy informs and shapes gender.

The novels of Erna Brodber and Toni Morrison, on the other hand, are informed by a black feminist ideology that stresses the discursive configurations of race and gender. In the hands of these writers, folk religion contains a black feminist theory of the body as plastic object. Previously, African-American literary critics have argued that folk religion provides a way to remember the black foremother, to trace a female genealogy, and to inspire black female creativity.[3] While many critics hope to remember a marginalized black women's history, they often romanticize and dehistoricize conjure as an ancient women's power based in female reproductive and regenerative abilities.[4] That is, the *supernatural* quality of conjure appears to inspire in critics the paradoxical desire to *naturalize* folk religion as an essentiall· and biologically female power, as an inherent ability that springs from the body. This chapter, on the other hand, turns to folk religion as a cultural trope that contains within itself a blueprint for a profoundly dynamic history rather than an inherently static one.[5] As Elizabeth Grosz

argues, the body is a threshold between nature and culture, an always-already cultural object influenced by social discourses.[6] Contemporary black women writers deploy folk religion as an emancipatory poetics that reclaims and rewrites the body as text, not as essence or substance. The cultural practice of folk religion enables black women to put forward a distinctive theory about the transformative relationship of power to the body, one that is articulated from a black perspective and that takes into consideration the role of black female resistance in the Caribbean and African America.

Conjure is a particularly useful paradigm for black women writers as it can be used to illustrate a concept of the body as writing. According to folk religion, bodies can be shaped by various cultural discourses, but also reshaped according to individual desire and the ability either to wield magic or to hire a conjure doctor. Bodies prove to be malleable texts. Delighting in physical disguise and bodily transformation, conjure doctors themselves are marked by, or written upon, their magical powers: by such physical anomalies as birthmarks, cauls, red eyes, and harelips. Furthermore, conjure doctors often emphasize their own gender ambiguity, which, as cultural historian Yvonne Chireau points out, "was but one potential means of augmenting the conjurer's peculiar status as spiritual outsider" (53). By terms used to denote conjure doctors such as "two-headed doctors," "double-sighters," and "longheads," folk religion indicates that the body is not a singular, essential substance but rather a doubled, malleable text. The

unpredictability of magic reveals that the body is plastic, porous object that stands as an interface between the poetic and political, between the domestic and the public. A fluid, improvisational practice that can be imposed upon the body by one conjurer and removed by another, folk religion enacts a corporeal feminist theory of power insofar as it allows African-American women writers to stress both the body's *construction by* and *resistance to* historical and discursive configurations. Folk religion, in other words, points to the profoundly unstable, but inevitably political, relationship of bodies to discourse, language, history, and gender.

Women, Fiction, and Folk Religion

The move by black women writers to use magic to empower the black ancestor, to remember history, and to resist dominant stereotypes about black women's bodies gains momentum in the past thirty years. The literary development of folk religion as a philosophy of bodies arose out of the black feminist movement in the 1970's, primarily as a response to Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." This feminist movement's primary purpose was to diversify a homogeneous concept of blackness, to consider black womens perspectives and powers in the struggle against colonization. Folk religion as an embodied sign of women's power gained popularity in reaction to the essentialism and patriarchy of the dominant group, but also to that of the subordinate group. That is, the feminist movement to

reclaim women's bodies through alternative forms of creativity and power locates itself in a reaction to the oppression of black women by white men *and* by black men. In particular, this latter form of oppression formulates itself most obviously in cultural nationalist movements such as the Black Arts movement. Conceived by such writers as Amiri Baraka, Addison Gayle, Jr., and Eldridge Cleaver, this movement develops out of an ideological desire to create a monolithic, androcentric concept of black pride and community. In the history of black nationalism, black women were most often relegated to the margins: they were expected to be secretaries, facilitators and nurturers.[7] In a comment, for instance, that reduces black women's bodies to their reproductive functions, Eldridge Cleaver states that the black woman's role in the revolution is to be "the womb that nurtured Toussaint L'Ouverture, that warmed Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey" (*Soul on Ice* 208; cited in Dubey 19). In his formulation of revolutionary activity, Cleaver assumes that only men deploy the magic of conjure in the Haitian revolution and the Vesey conspiracy. Black women writers, in reaction to this sexism within black cultural movements, reclaim magic as their own in order to validate the role of their foremothers. Alice Walker's search for her mother's garden, in conjunction with her search for artistic, conjuring foremother Zora Neale Hurston, produces the image of the conjure woman, who writes, conjures, and plants powerful roots in her garden in African-diasporic women's literature.[8]

Shape-shifting and contradictory, the practice of magic is process rather than product. It acts as a kind of border-crosser that highlights the continuities and the differences of the African diaspora. Walker's interest in magic and foremothers stretches not only across African America, where women writers form a new era in women's writing, but also to the Caribbean where Selwyn Cudjoe makes a similar claim about a second renaissance of women's fiction.[9] African-American and Caribbean women writers emphasize different elements of folk religion. African-American women writers associate conjure with artistry and creativity; Caribbean women writers associate conjure more closely with political power and activism. The African-American literary prominence of folk religion as a source of artistic writing appears in Walker's citation of Virginia Woolf. She quotes and transforms Woolf's words in *A Room of One's Own* to fit the parameters of African-American women's lives: "When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils [or "Sainthood"], of a wise woman selling herbs [our root workers], or even a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist" (cited in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" 407; parenthetical entries Walker's). Folk religion, in other words, provides a source of creativity otherwise denied to women. In the Caribbean, on the other hand, black women writers associate folk religion with political activism. For example, the editors of *Out of the Kumbla*, a compilation of critical essays on Caribbean women's fiction, not only expose their indebtedness to Alice Walker when

they articulate their need to find their own female ancestors, they also reveal their need to discover those women who actively participated in the struggle for freedom and equality.[10] Carole Boyce Davies writes,

> I feel a need to go in search of legendary Caribbean women. I need the knowledge of women who are comparable to Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Fannie Lou Hammer, Angela Davis, Queen Amina, to sustain me. I know they are there, but, it seems there is no history of women's participation in struggle in the Caribbean. . . . So far, Gandy Nanny, the Maroon mytho/legendary ancestress is the only one who is somewhat known. (preface)

In the Caribbean, then, Nanny appears to occupy a role parallel to Hurston's in African America: Nanny becomes the archetypal foremother in the Caribbean, but with a political activist twist.[11] Hurston's role as writer, anthropologist, and conjure woman draws attention to the symbolic potential of conjure as writing and fiction; Nanny's role as guerrilla revolutionary and conjure woman draws attention to the symbolic potential of magic as political tool.

Both Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* portray folk religion as a powerful language that reclaims the body of the female ancestor, that rewrites her body through a series of feminist, ambivalent, fluid meanings as opposed to the oppressive, fixed writings of patriarchy and colonialism. They depict folk religion as a language, a discourse that exposes the multiplicity of meanings that shape

the body; they show how the body is produced by, and in turn produces, discourse. When bodies are divorced from their *plural* cultural heritages, they are susceptible to oppressive conjuring as opposed to liberatory conjuring. That is, when they lose touch with the syncretic forces that have shaped them, bodies become weak, diseased, sick, and vulnerable to the oppressive power of evil conjure doctors. On the other hand, when connected to the plethora of origins which have shaped them, bodies grow strong and, through magic, can engage in resistance. In particular, Brodber portrays folk religion as an actual political weapon--a tool that can be used to oppress or liberate the body. Morrison depicts folk religion as a language that reveals the ways that bodies are created by a variety of discourses.

Erna Brodber's *Myal*

Set in Jamaica, where the magical practices of Nanny are well-known, Erna Brodber's *Myal* depicts magico-religious practices in doubled, ambivalent, and heterogeneous ways.[12] Portrayed as a function of plural cultural discourses, conjure can be used as a tool of oppression and violence, but also as a tool of liberation and healing.[13] Unlike the theorists of the Black Arts movement, Brodber does not assume that folk religion is an essentially black or liberatory cultural practice. Represented as a syncretic combination of West African oral and Western written languages, conjure acts as a profoundly

ambivalent idiom spoken both by men and women, by colonizer and colonized, for oppression and resistance.

Myal introduces us to two young girls, Anita and Ella, whose stories indicate that magico-religious practices can be used for either good or evil. Anita is a bright and attractive schoolgirl who is raped, through magical circumstances, by a leading member of the community. While studying music, the fifteen-year old Anita is magically assaulted by a mysterious person who throws stones at her. Her mother and the school teacher assume that school boys are the culprits, but, as it turns out, the real villain is Mass Levi, a respected community leader and conjure doctor, who attempts to rape Anita. By adopting the form of an invisible spirit, he stealthily visists her bedside at night and molests her. The second girl, Ella, is a light-skinned mulatta shunned by the members of her community for being illegitimate, ginger-haired, and strange. Adopted by a white woman, Maydene, and her mulatto husband named Reverend Brassington, Ella is alienated from her place and culture. Eventually, she marries a white American named Selwyn Langley, who further compounds her cultural isolation by conjuring away her culture and identity.[14]

By revealing that folk religion can be used as a function of oppression, Brodber represents magico-religious practices in such a way that complicates the easy assumption that folk religion and magic are essentially linked to black women's regenerative power.[15] Such conjectures about conjure are problematic, for they not only overlook the historical role of

folk religion as a practice wielded by men and women, but they are also based on overly-romanticized associations between black women's bodies and power--associations that reduce black women to a magical, exotic other. There is no such movement of exoticization that occurs in the novel, no one-to-one equation of black women with a kind of a hocus-pocus good, earth-based, sustaining magic. Rather, the novel tells the stories of Anita and Ella who are *victimized* by magic wielded by men. Anita is conjured by Mass Levi's malevolent magic. Overcome in a psychological battle of magic waged by those who would heal Anita, he is found dead in a latrine, clutching a magical doll replete with the likeness of Anita's face, "knife marks where her legs meet," and a "bright new nail through her neck" (75). Ella is conjured by her husband, whose use of magic is more subtle, if not equally damaging. His comes in the form of a theft of culture which is equivalent to the theft of spirit. Greedily listening to her stories about Jamaica, he appropriates her culture and transforms it into what he calls the greatest coon show on earth, *Caribbean Days and Nights*--leaving her with nothing but a poisoned body. As Ella's adopted mother says about this form of conjure, "[s]pirit thievery comes in so many forms" (83).

Brodber's depiction of folk religion reveals that colonization takes place at the level of the body and spirit. Which is not to say that colonization occurs only at the level of the private, the individual, the domestic, or indeed the feminine. Rather, the body/spirit acts as a microcosm for the

power relations that occur at the macrocosmic level. Folk religion becomes a paradigm for the plasticity of meanings created in the service of power. According to Brodber, colonization is akin to spirit thievery and zombification. Reverends Simpson and Brassington, two characters in the novel, deploy zombification as a metaphor for oppression. In an explanation that appears to give a new twist to Frantz Fanon's concept of the split of the colonial black self into white masks and black souls, Simpson explains that zombification is a

> phenomenon common in parts of Africa and places like Haiti and Brazil. . . . People are separated from the parts of themselves that make them think and they are left as flesh only. Flesh that takes directions from someone. The thinking part of them is also used as nefariously . . . 'immorally' might be a better word. . . . In those societies there are persons trained to do the separation and insertion. The name under which they go would be translated as spirit thieves. (108)

Zombification, in other words, is a term used to describe the effects of colonization on the subordinated other. It is a concept that expresses the contours of colonial subjectivities, giving voice and reality to the power relations that have mapped Jamaican history. Folk religions, with their cultural and syncretic influences, with their ambivalent interpretations and doubled practices, contain metaphors for power, thereby illustrating not only that subordinated groups are shaped by their interaction with colonization, but also that the dominant

culture is influenced by syncretic sources. In the fluid space of the novel, the definitive boundaries between the colonizers and the colonized blur and complicate upon inspection.

Magic as a function of oppression is wielded not only by those who practice Jamaican folk religions, but also by those who traffic in European culture and literature. At the end of the novel, Reverend Simpson recognizes the relationship between body and literature, between private and public, between conjure and writing. He says, "My people have been separated from themselves . . . by several means, one of them being the printed word and the ideas it carries" (108). Anita and Ella are made vulnerable to the evil of conjure when they are conscripted by the printed word which leaves no room for a plurality of other languages. The two girls become sick when they lose touch with the manifold complexity of their heritage. Anita is conjured, for instance, when she studies too closely Western texts, when she embraces too wholeheartedly European written musical scores. Brodber writes that she

> was studying. The kind that splits the mind from the body and both from the soul and leaves both open to infiltration. She was solfa-ing. This took a lot of concentration. She had to read the notes--first note on the line is "e"--and she had to remember the sound. 'Do re mi fa so la ti do.' (28)

Studying fixed musical notes, Anita allows the notation to fill her mind as though it were a truth text. Through her obsessive study of this single mode of knowledge, Anita is isolated from

the community and her body is transformed into a patriarchal version of the female body as both object and absence. The text plays on DesCartes' famous dictum "I think therefore I am"; when Anita thinks (in Western discursive terms), she is not.[16] Made vulnerable to "infiltration" through her studying, she literalizes the negations which shape Western thought about gender and race: not only does she lose weight and existentially disappear, she becomes a sexual object to be used by the patriarchal figure of the community.

Oppression-by-zombification not only works through its association with Western music, but with literature as well--this time, through the example of Ella, who is conscripted by European fiction. Associating conjure with European culture in this way, Brodber collapses the difference between so-called high and low art. That is, by allowing European texts to conjure Ella's body and spirit, Brodber dismantles Eurocentric notions about European literature taking predecence over Jamaican folk cultures in terms of value, power, and importance. Conjure and European culture both act up a level playing field--upon Ella's body which, as a text, illustrates the effects of colonization. Isolated from her own history, community, and indeed self, Ella eschews Grove Town to embrace the stories and geography of Europe so completely that European texts magically become reality: the maps of European geography "rose from the paper in three dimensions, grew big, came right down to her seat and allowed her to walk on it" (11). Through a kind of dream-conjure, these texts-become-reality enable her to take on a

Eurocentric persona: walking on these maps of Europe, she "met people who looked like her. She met Peter Pan and she met the Dairy Maid who could pass for her sister" (11). The effect of Ella's fantasy and isolation that is a splitting of self and body is obvious to at least one other character who observes her. Shortly before adopting Ella, Maydene Brassington comments when she sees Ella reciting a poem at a school performance:

> That little girl looked as if she was flying. Totally separated from the platform and from the people around her. 'Not just by color but as an angel in those Sunday school cards is separated from the people below . . . . But she is not happy up there in the sky. She wants to be real. (16)

Without a sense of culture or history, Ella fulfills the stereotype of the desexualized angel in the house: she becomes separated from her own body. Like Anita, Ella is divided from herself in a Cartesian simulation of body and self. But rather than manifest itself through sexual abuse, this separation of self from body expresses itself as a disease or illness. Brodber writes, for "years there had been something like gauze in [Ella's] head where she supposed her mind to be. It stretched flat across her head, separating one section of her mind from the other--the top of the head from the bottom of the head. In there were Peter Pan and Lucy Gray and Dairy Maid" (80). Rather than hold the illness at bay, the gauze plays a reverse role on her body and keeps the poisons inside her.

The novel is careful to double and complicate the practice of Myal yet again. While conjure is used to oppress, it can also be used to liberate. It *can* be re-spoken and re-configured as a healing, fluid, community-based language. Anita's and Ella's bodies are healed when they are redefined by a discourse that combines the collective reality of past and present, self and other. Previous scenes reveal that conjure can be used in oppressive ways, but the novel also shows that conjure can be deployed in communal and regenerative ways. Brodber's text depicts conjure in wildly varying and ambivalent fashion, and it is within that slippery place of the cultural ambiguity of meaning that the act of resistance gains its power and rallies its forces. The oppression of Anita's body is instigated by a Western, pseudo-positivistic written musical score, but her healing is occasioned by a communal, syncretic, improvisational, orally-expressed magic. In a scene reminiscent of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Anita's conjured body is exorcised by the singing of Miss Gatha, attended to by men and women. Led by conjure woman Miss Gatha, the strangers use "magic drums," "speaking drums," and "talking drums"--to encourage a discursive reunion of self and other (76). Remarkable for its subversiveness, Miss Gatha's singing does not adhere to any inherited or set pattern of notes. Rather she invests conjure with meanings on the spot. She "recited; she sang; she intoned. In one register, in another; in one octave, then higher. Lyrically, with syncopation, with improvisations far, far out from her original composition" (70-1). The improvisational

nature of her song overpowers Mass Levi. Unable to withstand the collective power and force of her singing, he thinks, "If only she didn't change her style so much! If she would only keep one tune, he could follow her and hold her. But that woman was slippery" (72). The literacy of the drum, and the fluidity of its meanings, write an alternate set of feminist meanings on the body. In opposition to a fixed language that splits self from soul, Miss Gatha's deployment of magic recreates the body in relationship to others. In a malleable refashioning of collective reality, Miss Gatha's body magically takes on Anita's form. Brodber writes, in a description of spirit possession: Miss Gatha's "face changed to that of a beautiful fifteen-year old and back again to that of a woman of Miss Gatha's sixty-odd years and back again and back again until she was silent, her limbs quiet and she was fifteen years old" (73).

In keeping with its plot complications, the novel does not associate resistance only with women or with improvisational music. Ella's spiritual health is restored with the help of Reverend Simpson, who encourages her to challenge the meanings of written Western texts. After she returns to Jamaica, she becomes a school teacher for young children in Grove Town and finds that a racist allegory is mandatory reading on the school curriculum.[17] As a text within a text, this story portrays Grove Town people as farm animals who cannot protect themselves or live without their master.[18] Although the farm animals run away, they ultimately return to the farm for they cannot fend for themselves and they realize that their rightful place is in

captivity. Clearly, the story-within-the-story depicts a colonial fantasy about child-like slaves who must be cared for by their masters; in fact, the story portrays, in a kind of kistch fashion, the notion of a benign and paternalistic slavery popularly advocated by historian Ulrich Phillips in America in 1918. Encouraging her to reject this colonial fantasy, Simpson chastises Ella: he asks her "Have you been zombified? . . . You have a quarrel with the writer. He wrote, you think without an awareness of certain things. But does he force you to teach without this awareness? Need your voice say what his says?" (107). With this cue, Ella learns to challenge the meanings of Western texts and discourses. Her coming to resistance marks a hopeful ending to Brodber's novel.

Without knowing it, then, Ella becomes part of a small group of conjure doctors who work secretly to end colonization and to resist oppression. Truly heterogeneous, conjure works as resistance through its association with both oral and written discourse, through a collective effort made by both men and women. Anita's body is healed by Miss Gatha's singing and the help of the others. The attack on her body, moreover, is initially attended to by Ole African.[19] When Mass Levi first begins his assault on Anita and magically barrages her house with stones, Ole African's presence and his crossed arms put an end to this first violation of Anita's space, flesh, and spirit. Similarly, Ella's healing occurs through collective effort. Her body is healed by the efforts of the male conjure doctor Mass Cyrus, and her spiritual healing aided by Reverend Simpson. The

act of healing, thus, is inscribed in ways that cannot be reduced to any essentialized equation, to any simple line of defense. As Puri points out that

> Maas [sic] Levi is black, but that does not stop him from using his knowledge of spirit possession for sexual domination. Rev. Brassington, who passes for white, is faithful to the colonial civilizing mission; but his 'better half,' Maydene Brassington, who is white, belongs to the community of resistance, along with Ole African, Miss Gatha, Maas [sic] Cyrus, and Baptist Rev. Simpson." (103).

Brodber posits a multiple, layered, syncretic discursive act of resistance that locates itself within a complex fashioning of communal effort and doubled cultural sources.

The novel, then, uses folk religion to expose the many syncretic cultural discourses that intersect in the colonial arena, and in particular affect the text of female bodies and subjectivities. Not only is conjure practiced by both the oppressor and the oppressed, it is also a discursive power that reveals how black women's bodies become the space of private and public maneuvering. Black women, however, refuse to be passive victims in the novel. Black (and white) women protagonists re-interpret magic in order to revise power relations in emancipatory ways. Thus, through magic, they are able to mark out a space for themselves in the larger reality of discourse, community, and history.

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* also portrays conjure as an excessive, discredited practice that complicates the relationship of bodies to language and to meaning-making systems.[20] Morrison deploys magic to reveal the plurality of discourses that create the body and to demystify the notion of singular and authentic origins. In order that their bodies be healthy and their subjectivities be whole, the characters in *Song of Solomon* must learn to recognize and claim the diversity of their cultural origins.

In its most obvious manifestation in the novel, folk religion inscribes itself on the body of Pilate Dead, an idiosyncratic conjure woman who is born without a navel.[21] A blank slate, Pilate's stomach confounds the logic of biological reality and the rationale of Western discourse. She is born with a stomach as smooth as her back, a bodily deformity that appears to give her the power to "fly" in the face of convention and to speak out of place--not only in relationship to white oppressive discourses, but also to the internalized racist and sexist discourses in the black community. It allows her to gain the courage to start from "zero" and throw away "every assumption she had learned" (149). Her stomach signifies a discursive otherness which in part can be known, but whose difference cannot be fully collapsed into any totalizing explanation. Her body represents "otherness," but, as the townspeople in *Song of Solomon* can testify, "otherness" is difficult to pin down or

explain away. They assume that Pilate's unmarked stomach signifies that "she had not come into this world through normal channels," that it gives her remarkable magical abilities to transform a man into a ripe rutabaga (27). Her brother Macon, on the other hand, believes he can explain the lack of her navel through the realistic discourse of their mother's death, for he was there when she was born and "had seen the eyes of the midwife as his mother's legs collapsed" (28). But Pilate's stomach refuses both the townspeople's romanticized exaggerations and Macon's reductive logic: her body confuses notions of right and wrong, cause and effect, natural and supernatural, for it conforms to all of the explanations and yet to none of them. Pilate does have supernatural abilities, but these abilities are rendered absurd by the assumption that she can transform a man into a ripe root-vegetable. Macon's rationalism is similarly diffused, for while Pilate is born of her mother's womb, her blank stomach cannot be explained merely through the rational explanation of her mother's death.

Pilate's body may appear to be typically "other," but it refuses to inhabit any stereotypical place of otherness or marginality imposed upon black women by sexist and racist discourses. Pilate's bodily otherness proves truly other, a sliding signifier which undercuts even its own significations in representation. For Pilate's magical stomach destabilizes the assumption of black woman as a political, racial, or gendered absence.[22] Ironically suggesting while simultaneously repudiating the notion of a blank slate, her stomach stands as a

parodic analog to the notion of the slave as tabula rasa: it represents and reproaches the historical belief that slaves crossed the Middle Passage without any cultural crossover, without the importation of West African beliefs, practices, or cultures.[23] Pilate's body validates a different form of language and literacy. Her body is blank, I argue, not because it is without cultural codes, but because it is devoid of any 'visible' discursive marking. Marked perhaps by what Haitian Vodun believers would call "Les Invisibles," in reference to their spirits and ancestors, Pilate's body repudiates Western privileging of sight as the dominant faculty which measures reality. For if we cannot see the codes which inscribe Pilate's body, we must perhaps listen for them. The echoes and whispers of magic which surround Pilate's body like the slow circling of gossip and rumors, situate the novel in an African-American tradition of orality. Pilate is a woman who produces and is produced through song. She is even born of a mother named "Singing Bird"--a native American woman who represents the plural constructions of blackness and the absent "mother" tongue of an oral culture. Morrison attempts to reproduce in her novels what is distinctly African American about art, which she identifies as "the ability to be both print and oral literature"--a combination suggesting that "the stories can be read in silence" but also that "one should be able to hear them as well" ("Rootedness" 341).

Pilate's magical abilities derive from her connection both to oral West African and written Western cultures. Following the

Dead family tradition, her father chooses his daughter's name from the Bible and copies it onto a piece of paper. While Pilate's father names her from a sacred text of Western tradition, he undercuts the sanctity of the written word by his inability to read or write. In fact, he chooses Pilate's name randomly from the page and copies it "as illiterate people do, every curlicue, arch, and bend in the letters, and presented it to the midwife"(18). The random act of his choosing her name, selecting a group of letters which appeared "strong and handsome" demonstrates the distance between appearance and its meaning (18). When Pilate's father first hears the name read by midwife, he misunderstands her enunciation and hears not "Pilate" but "pilot" (19). Echoing Derrida's pun with the French verbs *to differ* and *to defer*, Morrison challenges the concept of language as self-identical through the word play of suspended meanings. Like Derrida, who demonstrates the distance between *differance* and *difference* as an example of the ambiguity which lies at the heart of both a phonetic and a written language, Morrison uses Pilate and pilot to indicate how both oral and written languages slide along a scale of interpretation and inscription of ambivalence.[24] Her body is thus used in the text to signal the instability of meanings and to elaborate upon the linguistic space of uncertainty which makes resistance possible. The oral quality of Pilate's name also places her within an oral West African tradition. Pilate herself signals her awareness of her relationship to an oral cultural tradition when she hangs the slip of paper bearing her name from her ear.[25] Her attention

to her own name signifies a Bantu belief that a child only becomes human through the oral pronunciation of her name. Seemingly aware of the ephemeral quality of her human rights in America and the significance of resisting dominant interpretation of black slave bodies as wordless, voiceless, and nameless, Pilate respects the act of black speech and is fluky "about her own name at twelve" (19). She takes the slip of paper bearing her name, "folded it up into a tiny knot and put it in a little brass box, and strung the entire contraption through her left earlobe" (19).

Lest one believe that Pilate is all "other," that she is all magical and West African and conjure woman, however, let us consider her name even more carefully. Milkman is correct in assuming that names have meanings--often multiple meanings which change with time and circumstance. Pilate's name indicates not only her oral West African heritage, but also her complicity in the written and sacred texts of the Western culture. Morrison's inscription of magic in *Song of Solomon* does not constitute the naive return to West Africa as a pure pre-history or place; rather, Morrison problematizes the notion of an essentialized cultural heritage. Pilate is actualized by Western social practices as well as by West African ones. Specifically, she is named after Pontius Pilate, one of the most notorious men in the New Testament (second only to Judas), a man who washed his hands of social and personal responsibility and shrugged off the murder of the son of God. Such a legacy is a heavy one, but Morrison's text, with its playful and magical inversions of

linear logic, establishes Pilate's relationship to her namesake and the written word as a revision of patriarchal law. Morrison inverts and dismantles male Christian meanings by inserting Pilate in between the logocentric word and its male creator and allowing for the free play of signification. As a conjure woman, Pilate engenders alternate readings and subject-positionings which challenge those traditionally associated with her biblical namesake. Like Pontius Pilate, Pilate Dead stands in relationship to a so-called murder--but in her case, the murder is not a murder at all, and its victim is hardly the son of God but a gold prospector. *Unlike* Pontius Pilate, Pilate Dead refuses to wash her hands of social or personal responsibility for her actions. Although mistaken in her belief that her brother murdered a man, she still returns and claims responsibility for the human life she believes her brother to have murdered. The fact that she has been carrying around her father's bones, in a poignant misreading of his admonition, "You just can't fly off and leave a body," speaks of her responsibility to the ancestors, to the past, and to the community. Although she stands outside the community as a conjure woman, Pilate, unlike her male namesake, adheres to a version of subjectivity which defines itself in relation to social and personal responsibility. Pilate, thus, intervenes in the patriarchal law of biblical figures and "speaks" a language which enables access to the construction of meaning for the many and not just for the few.

Representing Pilate in fluid relationship to plural discourses, Morrison challenges the concept of subjectivity as autonomous, essential, and ahistorical. Pilate defines herself in relationship to others and becomes a composite of numerous elements. As Morrison puts it, Pilate is "the best of that which is female and the best of that which is male, and that balance is disturbed if it is not nurtured" ("Rootedness" 344). Pilate's role as the "apogee" of "balance" is dependent upon her relationship with both men and women; her role as deferred signifier is dependent upon her movement through the binary oppositions of both the male and the female, the past and the present, the oral and the written, the West African and the Western. As a woman named after a man, Pilate repudiates the notion of authority or authorship as generated through sexuality--either male or female. In *Song of Solomon*, discourse is the product neither of a Lacanian phallus nor of Irigaray's "two lips which are not one." Gender cannot be reduced to naturalized or biological meanings. Rather, through an imaginative and magical twist, Morrison destabilizes the notion of women's sexuality as absence by using the navel as a supreme sign of signification--the navel exists in ironic relationship to the phallus as transcendental signifier. Pilate's navel, whose magical lack gains so much attention, is ultimately merely a "corkscrew," a meaningless piece of flesh which has no use or significance--sexual or otherwise (143). When Pilate asks about the function of a navel, she is informed that "it's for people who were born natural" (143). Pilate, however, does not know the

word and her naive repetition "Navel?" as a question undercuts the notion that bodies have transcendental, self-evident, and natural meanings. In this way, Morrison undercuts the fixity of gender difference. Pilate reveals that she has always read her lack of her navel not as a sign of her unnatural status as a woman (as a *mer*maid, as one man shouts at her), but just the opposite; in her interpretive framework, she conceives of her absent navel as a sign of the *natural* biological differences between men and women. With clear and understandable logic, she deduces that her brother

> peed standing up. She squatting down. He had a penis like the horse did. She had a vagina like the mare. He had a flat chest with two nipples. She had teats like the cow. He had a corkscrew in his stomach. She did not. She thought it was one more way in which males and females were different (143).

Underscoring the distance between natural and socially inscribed meanings, Pilate dismantles the logic of Western rationalist discourse by associating 'unnatural' difference (the lack of a navel), with 'natural' differences (such as genitalia). The irreducible sign of nature is reproduced in her own imagination, demonstrating the distance between the sign of gender and its associated naturalized meanings.

Pilate crosses and subverts discursive boundaries of culture, meaning, and gender. In the same way that conjure derives from various countries and ideologies, so too Pilate travels through geographies and discourses: she is a woman who

had "read only a geography book, but had been from one end of the country to another" (139). Bodies which are not located in a tradition of folk religion and history, however, are strikingly fixed and landlocked by contrast. Ruth, for instance, is a woman sequestered by the limitations of hegemonic male discourse. As she tells her son, "the fact is that I am a small woman. I don't mean little; I mean small because I was pressed small. I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package" (124). Similarly, Milkman is a static character whose body is constrained and pressed small by the space he inhabits. He is a character who does not/can not travel, either geographically or linguistically, until the end of the novel. Deformed and hampered by the hegemonies of a dominant culture, Milkman limps when he walks. His body is "flawed" for, as an arrogant and self-centered man who refuses to take responsibility for the pain and emotions of others, when he "stood barefoot straight as a pole, his left foot was about half an inch off the floor" (62). This half inch off the floor designates the space which exists between Milkman and a collective reality, past and present. Without ties to, or knowledge of, his family heritage, Milkman lacks the constructed "coherence" of a healthy and whole self; it "was all very tentative, the way he looked, like a man peeping around a corner of someplace he is not supposed to be" (69-70). Unable to inhabit time or space with any confidence, Milkman cannot travel through the ambiguities of language or discourse.

Defined by traditional, damaging discourses, Milkman cannot conceive of others (and especially of women) as human beings. As Morrison writes, never "had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own" (75). He had, moreover, never "been able to distinguish [his sisters] (or their roles) from his mother" (68). In order to learn to define himself in a manner which destabilizes the disempowering binary of self and other, Milkman must travel to learn what Pilate already knows--that whole and liberatory subjectivity exists in association with the community, not in opposition to it. Milkman, clearly, is not in touch with his "ancient properties." Isolated from his historical and filial properties, he is fixed in and by a dominant Western discourse of masculinity--Milkman has nothing feminine or West African or magical about him. His limp, for instance, defines him in *opposition* to his actual heritage or "natural" father, who "had no imperfection," but in constructed relation to the 'father' of America, the president, FDR (63). Connected in such a way only to America, Milkman's body gives credence to the dominant myth that the nation is a cultural and historical homogenous space. As a result, his body is appropriately lopsided. He defines himself only in negative relationship to his othered and forgotten heritage. Anyone familiar with Yoruban mythology, or who has read Gates's *The Signifying Monkey*, recognizes Milkman's deformity as a sign of Esu Elegbara--the trickster god of the crossroads who is said to have legs of different lengths because he stands with one foot

in the realm of the profane, and one foot in the realm of the divine. In a description of Esu, Gates writes,

> Each version of Esu is the sole messenger of the gods (in Yoruba, *iranse*), he who interprets the will of the gods to man; he who carries the desires of man to the gods. Esu is the guardian of the crossroads, master of style and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane. Frequently characterized as an inveterate copulator possessed by his enormous penis, linguistically Esu is the ultimate copula, connecting truth with understanding, the sacred with the profane, text with interpretation, the word (as the form of the verb to be) that links a subject with its predicate. He connects the grammar of divination with it rhetorical structures. (6)

I quote Gates at length, not only for his eloquent summing up of Esu, but for his language which, in my mind, works as a *negative* description of Milkman. Milkman's body, it seems to me, cannot be further away from his historical origins and its tradition of community, folk culture, and history. He may be possessed of his penis (Magdalene accuses him of defining his character by "that hog's gut that hangs down between your legs"), but he is hardly a linguistic copula (215). He may be a master of style (throughout the novel, people admire his suits and shoes), but certainly not of the stylus. He is a character who cannot read the signs around him, who has never travelled from his hometown,

much less through the vagaries of language. If Milkman has any relationship to language, it is one which claims complete authority over the word as absolute. Magdalene accuses him of speaking a language of domineering authority: "You've been laughing at us all your life. Corinthians. Mama. Me. *Using* us, *ordering* us, and *judging* us . . . Who are you to approve or disapprove of anything?" (215; emphasis mine).

Milkman, then, like Pilate, acts in an inverted relationship to his cultural forebears. He may bear a physical resemblance to Esu, but he bears no discursive similarity to him. Morrison, thus, does not merely turn on its head a binary of opposition of West African versus Western culture. *Song of Solomon* does not deconstruct Western culture, and then represent West African culture as a transparent, authentic reality. In this way, Morrison's text illustrates a concept developed by critic Michael Dash that subordinated culture is a syncretic text of multiple and contradictory practices. In a discussion of the many cultural meanings which are embedded in postcolonial history, he argues that the Negritude movement in Caribbean literature is flawed in its attempt to uphold an Afro-Caribbean culture of Vodun as an "essentially" African culture. Deploying Rene Depestre's central thesis, Dash argues that in "each national community diverse influences have fused and synthesized to form a new and specific national culture" (63-64). Similarly, Morrison's text maintains a complex, imaginative, and syncretic relationship to both cultures--West African and Western. Milkman, in fact, loses his physical resemblance to Esu when he

travels South and discovers his syncretic heritage. The more he learns to position himself within history and the community, the more his body revises any crippling hegemonic social inscriptions it may have borne. His body gains the fleshly absence associated with Pilate's stomach when he returns to his family roots. During a hunting trip when he learns to interact with his community and nature, Milkman walks the earth "like he belonged on it: like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there . . . And he did not limp" (281).

In returning to Virginia, Milkman gets more than he bargained for. He not only returns to Macon's and Pilate's childhood home in pursuit of gold, he returns to the origins of slavery in America--it was in Virginia in 1619 that the slaves first set foot on American soil. His travels enact a reversed journey to those depicted by slave narratives. As opposed to travelling North to gain his freedom, Milkman must travel South--to the beginning so that he may revise his endings. He ultimately finds an alternative kind of treasure (spiritual treasure), but his pretext for travelling (actual treasure) is historically and culturally appropriate. Not only was one of the first slave ships to transport slaves to America called *The Treasurer*, but so too is the language of consumerism a language of slavery throughout the book. Slavery's reduction of human bodies to property is echoed in the novel through Macon's buying of property, Hagar's love of material objects, and her conception of herself as an object to be dressed in Little Joyce

heels and given as a gift to Milkman. Like the peacock weighed down by its jeweled feathers, Milkman cannot fly, for he is weighed down by his vanity. He can only escape the language of slavery and gain his freedom when he leaves behind his material aspirations. He finally inhabits the fullness and fluidity of doubled space when he learns to layer the West African with the Western--when (in fact) he sings the song of Solomon. At this point, he learns (by implication) the languages of both West Africa and Western cultures, for the Song of Solomon is both a song of Milkman's ancestors and a song from the Bible. As sung by his ancestors, and in particular by Solomon's wife Ryna, it is a song of loss and lament. The biblical Song of Solomon, however, is an erotic song of love between a bride and a groom. Transposing both sources, Milkman overlays the two and creates a third song, a song which is the text written by Morrison. In an act of multiple layering, Milkman sings the song of Solomon to a dying Pilate who first sang it in a different version at the beginning of the novel. The issue of repetition and its differences comes full circle when a woman singing to a man shifts into a man singing to a woman. Pilate's song "O Sugarman done fly away/ Sugarman done gone/ Sugarman cut across the sky/ Sugarman gone home . . . " (5) turns into Milkman's song "Sugargirl don't leave me here/ Cotton balls to choke me/ Sugargirl don't leave me here/ Buckra's arms to yoke me" (340). Milkman does not merely repeat his ancestor's song--he represents and revises it. He both is and is not the sugarman. He is a man who refuses to eat sugar for its associations with

death and who leaps into the sky and rides the wind. However, unlike his ancestor, he does not leap *away* from his family, but rather towards them. Solomon's act, while one of freedom, is circumscribed by the patriarchal discourses of autonomy. Solomon left behind twenty-one children and a wife. Milkman has finished leaving people behind. When he flies, he leaps to join Pilate--who without ever having left the ground knew how to fly--and into the killing arms of his brother, Guitar.

Both Brodber's *Myal* and Morrison's *Song of Solomon* deploy folk religion in order to reveal the how bodies inhabit and move through layered and textured spaces. In Brodber's novel, folk religion is depicted in morally ambiguous ways that expose the intersections of colonizing and colonized cultures and the effects of these intersections on race and gender. Morrison's novel uses folk religion to emphasize the competing cultural discourses that make up private and public spaces, bodies and nations.

Notes to Chapter 4

[1]For historical scholarship on Nanny and her brother Cudjoe, see: Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal*; Gad Heuman, ed. *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance, and Marronage*; and Milton McFarlane, *Cudjoe the Maroon*.

[2]Historically, conjure manifests itself in a remarkable relationship to the body. Not only does it use the material of the body (nail and hair clippings) as elements of power but so too it writes itself in a language of physical ailments (boils, blindness, worms) on the body. Moreover, conjure has been used to gain control over the body: women have used it to gain the sexual attention of a lackadaisical lover, to ensure the fidelity of a wayward husband, and to deal with sexual rivals. See Luisah Teish's *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*.

[3]See Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers, eds., *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* and Houston A. Baker *Workings of the Spirit*.

[4]In *Workings of the Spirit*, for instance, Houston A. Baker equates conjure with women's "regenerative" functions. In *Conjuring*, Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers unproblematically refer to conjure as women's ancient power.

[5]See Susan R. Bordo "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," and Elizabeth Grosz "Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism" for further readings on feminist theories of the body.

[6]Grosz argues that the body gives feminists a way to re-theorize power relations, for the "body is not an intervening medium between ideological/social systems and individual belief systems" (12). Rather, as Grosz points out, bodies are "the object of dual power relations which inscribe it both socially and idiosyncratically, both externally and internally. The body is both the means by which power is disseminated and a potential object of resistance to power" (12).

[7]The patriarchy of the Negritude movement can be seen in those writers who are remembered. Leopold-Sedar Senghor, Aimee Cesaire, and Leon Damas, for instance, are commonly referred to as the 'fathers' of the Negritude movement, while such writers as Pauline Nardal and her sisters, who hosted the literary and cultural salons for the development of these ideas, are often forgotten and overlooked.

[8]It was her desire to learn more about Vodun, appropriately enough, that led Walker to rediscover Hurston. See "Saving the Life that is Your Own" in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*.

[9]As Selwyn Cudjoe writes, the "publication of Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) ushered in a new era in the writing of

women in the English-speaking Caribbean" (*Caribbean Women Writers* 43).

[10]Fido writes, "Alice Walker's definition of 'womanism' certainly is not the only one we have, but it has become central. She emphasized cultural aspects of the African community as a central part of her understanding of womanism" (preface to *Out of the Kumbla*).

[11]In a move remarkably similar to Walker's search for Hurston's grave, for instance, Caribbean critic Lucille Mathurin Mair searches through official records to find the Nanny's birth and death dates in order to document the history of this rebellious conjure woman ("Recollections of a Journey into a Rebel's Past" 53).

[12]Shalini Puri's "An 'Other' Realism: Erna Brodber's *Myal*" is a particularly engaging and illuminating analysis of Brodber's novel. Placing her discussion in context of her rebuke to postmodernists who privilege the magic in "magic realism," she argues that *Myal* resists binarized oppositions and proceeds "through a complex series of halvings and doublings" (99). She claims that "the controlling image of the novel is thus itself double-valenced: if spirit possession can make the living dead, it can also make the dead live; it can signal both objectification and subjectification, both servitude and liberation" (101). Catherine Nelson-McDermott argues that Brodber constructs a syncretic cultural space that resists colonial dialectics. She writes, "[if] myal is the process by which one resists spirit thievery or recovers both those doing the thievery and those the thievery is practiced upon, the processes and levels of myal-ing in this text are legion and work in concentric and interlocking circles" (60). For further readings of *Myal*, see Helen Tiffin's "Decolonization and Audience: Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*"; Tiffin's "Cold Hearts and (Foreign) Tongues: Recitation and the Reclamation of the Female Body in the Works of Erna Brodber and Jamaica Kincaid"; Evelyn O'Callaghan's "Engineering the Female Subject: Erna Brodber's *Myal*"; and Wilson Harris's "The Life of Myth and its Possible Bearing on Erna Brodber's Fictions: *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and *Myal*."

[13]Conjure is a term I use throughout the dissertation to indicate magico-religious practices in general. It is also a term that Brodber herself uses in reference to conjure doctors. See *Myal* 66.

[14]Puri makes an excellent point when she notes that Selwyn Langley comes from a family of herbalists and conjure doctors. She draws our attention to Brodber's text, which states that "[Selwyn Langley comes] from a long line--long for America--of chemists, manufacturers of herbal medicines and today doctors and travelling medical lecturers" (Brodber 42; Puri 103).

[15]See Pryse's and Spillers's *Conjuring* and Baker's *Workings of the Spirit*.

[16]Reverend Simpson strongly suggests that Anita be kept away "from any occupation which forced her into *solitary* mind expansion" (57; emphasis mine).

[17]Both Helen Tiffin and Shalini Puri point out that this story about farm animals was actually taught in Jamaica a "generation" (Tiffin's term) ago. See pages 32 and 100 respectively.

[18]As Puri notes, "the inhabitants of the community of resistance--Mas [sic] Cyrus, Ole African, Rev. Simpson, Miss Gatha, Maydene Brassington--communicate with one another using code names--the names of the animals in the allegory" (111). She astutely argues that "the entire narrative of *Myal* also disrupts the allegory; the novel as a *whole* enacts an alternative ending to the allegory, one in which they do not return to work for Mr. Joe, but go to work for their collective liberation" (111).

[19]Brodber links Ole African to Rastafarianism in her description of "Ole African with his dreadful hair" (45).

[20]Numerous critics focus on the relationship between magic, history, and naming in *Song of Solomon*. In "Magic Realism, Historical Truth, and the Quest for a Liberating Identity: Reflections on Alex Haley's *Roots* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," Sandford Pinsker argues that the genre of magic realism allows Morrison to re-imagine the truths of history from an African-American perspective in *Song of Solomon*. In "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call," P. Gabrielle Foreman similarly examines how Allende and Morrison employ magic realism in order to rewrite history from a feminist perspective. She points out that for Morrison, women are the simultaneously the site of the historical and the magical (371). In "Naming, Magic and Documentary: The Subversion of the Narrative in *Song of Solomon*, *Ceremony* and *China Men*," Paula Rabinowitz argues that these novels, in the tradition of Latin American magic realism, fuse multiple cultural and historical influences. Furthermore, she points out that the novels also reveal syncretic narrative styles that combine "aspects of American culture and Western literary forms with the oral traditions of women's and each minority group's cultures" (28). In "Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," Joseph Skerrett, Jr. argues that Pilate acts as a griot or storyteller who demonstrates "the continuing relationship between the living and the dead" (196). In "Beyond Realism: The Fictions of Toni Morrison," Keith E. Byerman argues that names and naming bring humanity to the characters in the novel, in keeping with "African cultures in which the name is the expression of the soul" (70). And finally, Trudier Harris examines the representations of folk culture in Morrison's fiction as a combination of the author's imagination and of communal memory (*Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* 10).

[21]Pinsker argues that the Pilate's lack of a navel indicates her fundamental humanity--that she is in "close touch with the raw nerves of human feeling" (194).

[22] Mae Henderson makes a similar point concerning Sethe's body. See Mae G. Henderson, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text," 69.

[23] E. Franklin Frazier, for instance, maintains that black Americans retained none of their African values--that African-American religion was primarily the result of white missionary work. W. E. B. Du Bois and Melville Herskovits were the earliest and most notable scholars who did not assume that the displacement of West Africans eroded African cultural, linguistic, and religious influences. They acknowledged that when Africans survived the Middle Passage, they brought with them, not a coherent African world view, but a heterogeneous series of beliefs, cultures, and religious practices. See Raboteau, 48-75.

[24] Gates makes a similar point between signifying, and signifyin(g) in *The Signifying Monkey*, 46.

[25] Foreman makes a similar point about the folded slip of paper hanging from Pilate's ear in "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call" (372).

Conclusion

Folk religion provides a source of inspiration, and yet also a unique dilemma, for Caribbean and African-American writers who have had to negotiate between received Western notions about literature as a sign of reason and folk religion as a so-called sign of irrationality. Historically, Caribbean and African-American writers have attempted to bridge the gap between literature and folk religion, between the educated and the folk, with varying levels of success. Their depictions, especially in the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries, are often filtered through middle-class assumptions about who the "folk" are and what they represent. For instance, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*, and Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces* depict folk religion in accordance with class biases of their time, using methods such as dialect to indicate that those who practice conjure are of a certain sub-optimum class background and educational standard. In Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900), folk religion is often associated with a lower class that speaks in clumsy and quaint sentences. Through the character Dr. Peters, magic is represented as a kind of humorous and folksy practice to be regarded with condescending affection. At the same time, however, magic is nonetheless legitimized. The character Madame Frances can actually divine the future; she foretells the unfortunate demise of the novel's villain, John Langley. Magic,

in other words, is not mere superstition--it is represented as a valid and legitimate form of knowledge.

Increasingly over the course of the twentieth century, the class biases associated with dialect fall away until folk religion is depicted as a kind of writing itself. In the early twentieth century, both Caribbean and African-American writers became preoccupied with the notion that Negro literature should not merely imitate white culture and writing, recognizing that folk religions provide a unique and original source of black creativity. This focus on folk religions as a politically appropriate subject for literature gained momentum as early as 1898, when black intellectuals such as H.T. Kealing called upon black writers to portray the "indigenous" quality of Negroes that "no alien could duplicate." He believed that the black writer should "reach down to the original and unexplored depths of his own being where lies unused the material that is to provide him with a place among the great writers."[1] But while many writers acknowledged a folk heritage as a function of a creative *slave* culture, Zora Neale Hurston was the first to collapse folk religion and writing in such a way that revealed an influence, similarity, and association between the two. Even though her work is problematic for its assumptions that traditional practices need to be preserved from the ravaging effects of technology, she saw folk religion as a source which inspired her writing, as a source of literary paternity itself. Claude McKay, Wilson Harris, Charles Johnson, Toni Morrison, and Erna Brodber are writers who also incorporate folk culture in

their fiction in legitimizing ways, and who increasingly inscribe in folk religion a vision of writing as magic.

Highlighting the improvisational nature of folk religion, Hurston, McKay, Harris, Johnson, Brodber, and Morrison focus on magic as a source of process, movement, and instability that reveals deeper revelations about the internal nature of the sign and its relationship to power. This is not to say that folk religion has been depicted homogeneously throughout the twentieth century. The proponents of the Harlem Renaissance, the Negritude, and the Black Arts movements may have interpreted folk culture as a source of black creativity, but they did so in such ways that indicated an adherence to essentialism and stasis, not to process and movement. The writers of the Negritude movement, for instance, turned to folk religion as essential signs of black qualities, such as passion, creativity, and energy. Similarly, the proponents of the Harlem Renaissance argued that folk culture acted as a site of Negro creativity and some writers, such as James Weldon Johnson, viewed folk religion according to received notions of writing. Johnson argued that the folk were neither sophisticated nor articulate. In *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, he writes that folk culture, as a "lower form of art," has to be "carried . . . to the altitudes of art," that it, as "a vast mine of material," has to be turned by a "serious" "great composer" or artist into "classic form" (14; quoted in Gunter Lenz, "Southern Exposures" 85). Finally, the Black Arts movement, which Charles Johnson views as a child of Negritude, turns to music as a source of "authentic" black

creativity. Thus while there is a burgeoning literary interest in folk culture and religion in the twentieth century, the emphasis on process, hybridity, and ambivalence evinced by the writers studied in this dissertation do not comprise a monolithic approach to the subject.

The literary trajectory traced by this work is not a smooth or consistent one, then. The portrayals of folk religion are as much a part of the idiosyncratic imagination of the individual writer as they are part of a larger cultural and literary tradition. Richard Wright, for instance, is one example of a writer who approaches folk religion in problematic and dismissive ways. But even his own work is an example of the changes and inconsistencies that can occur in the representation of folk religion--insofar as Wright himself changes his opinion about folk religion in different works. In his autobiography *Black Boy* (1937), Wright discusses folk culture and religion in patronizing ways. He mulls over "the essential bleakness, . . . the cultural barrenness of black life," the barrenness of "our traditions" (45). But in "Blueprint for Negro Writing (1937), he argues that black folklore is "living and powerful;" it is "the Negro writer's most powerful weapon" (45). His work indicates the limits within which the notion of a literary tradition can be discussed. Whereas there are larger patterns that can be discerned in the portrayals of folk religion in the African diaspora, there are also variations in this pattern.

These inconsistent depictions of folk religion are significant to the examination of literary traditions, for they

reveal that historicization is important to literary analysis and to cultural study. By bringing together a study of the history and literature of folk religion, this work is able to circumvent a double theoretical bind articulated in debates about resistance. On one hand, Spivak argues that a lack of historicization in the theoretical study of resistance leads to what she calls the essentializing of the subaltern voice--that is, to the assumption that the subaltern can speak in a voice uninflected by colonization. On the other hand, Benita Parry points out that another danger arises in which too much theoretical attention to the act of resistance results in an assumption that the subaltern woman failed to challenge the dominant group. Folk religion provides an example that shows how the subordinated culture did resist against the dominant group, but in ways that were influenced by the dominant culture. Folk religion illustrates how resistance occurs in the diaspora, but does not occur outside history.

Folk religion, then, becomes a germane point of entry into an analysis and discussion of resistance in the literature of the African diaspora. Not only does it enable an historicized examination of resistance from the perspective of slaves, but it also embodies certain theoretical principles about the nature of resistance as a product of syncretic cultural discourses that exist in conjunction with the dominant ideology. The study of Hurston, McKay, Harris, Johnson, Brodber, and Morrison reveals that, in an African-diasporic context, the practice of magic is doubled, mobile, and excessive. It can be used either as curse

or blessing, as oppression or resistance. It contains within its cultural parameters a theoretical caveat that reminds the literary critic that so-called "native" practices are never "authentically" liberatory. Although the practice of magic might appear to be absolutely "other," it is a hybrid socio-religious practice and ideology that combines Western and West African religious traditions and thereby explodes any rationalist discourse that would orientalize subordinate cultures. Folk religion can be manipulated as a discourse of oppression when it is employed as a dominant ideology that stresses hegemony and homogeneity. Just as easily, however, it can be manipulated as a discourse of resistance when it is wielded as a feminist ideology that emphasizes community and plurality. A fickle and malleable practice that can be shape-shifted to fit a variety of conflicting purposes and values, folk religion proves to be the ultimate wild card, a signifier translated by ideology to take on radically different meanings. From the perspective of the African diaspora, folk religion shows that resistance is a fluid, ambivalent practice that springs from the margins, from the places of overlap between dominant and subordinated cultures, from liminal boundaries and border spaces.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] A.M.E. *Review*, XV (Oct. 1998), 629-30. Quoted in August Meier *Negro Thought In America 1880-1915*, 266.

Bibliography

Abercrombie, Nicholas, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner. *The Dominant Ideology Thesis.* London: Allen and Unwin, 1980.

Alho, Olli. *The Religion of the Slaves: A Study of the Religious Tradition and Behaviour of Plantation Slaves in the United States.* 1830-1865. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarium Fennica, 1976.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards An Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.* Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127-186.

-----. *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx.* London: Verso, 1972.

Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts.* New York: International, 1943.

-----. *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion.* New York: Humanities Press, 1966.

Arnold, James, ed. *A History of Literature in the Caribbean.* Vol III Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins P, 1997.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* London: Routledge, 1989.

Atkins, John. *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and The West Indies.* 1735. London: Frank Cass, 1970.

Saint Augustine, *The City of God* Vol II Trans. Marcuss Dodds. 1872. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1934.

Awkward, Michael. "Appropriative Gestures: Theory and Afro-American Literary Criticism." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 360-367.

-----. *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels.* New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

Awolalu, J. Omosade. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites.* London: Longman Group, 1979.

Baer, Hans. A. *The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism.* Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1984.

Baker, Houston A. "Workings of the Spirit: Conjure and the Space of Black Women's Creativity." *Workings of the Spirit.* Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1991. 69-101.

Baldwin, James. "Princes and Powers." *Nobody Knows My Name.* New York: Corgi Ed, 1969.

Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Salt Eaters.* New York: Vintage Books, 1981.

Baraka, Amiri. "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature.'" *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 165-171.

Barbot, John. *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea.* London: 1732.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Text.* Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill & Wang, 1977. 142-148.

-----. *Mythologies.* Granada: Paladin, 1970.

Bascom, William R. *Shango in the New World.* Austin: U of Texas P., 1972.

Bascom, William R. and Melville J. Herskovits. *Continuity and Change in African Cultures.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958.

Bayle, Pierre. *Oeuvres Diverses.* vol III. Hildesheim: Georg Olm. 1966.

-----. *Reponse aux Questions d'un Provincial.* Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1704.

Bell, Berard W. *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition.* Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.

Bennett, Jr., Lerone. *The Shaping of Black America: The Struggles and Triumphs of African-Americans, 1619 to the 1990's.* New York: Penguin, 1993.

Benveniste, Emile. Problems in General Linguistics. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables, Fla: U of Miami P, 1971.

Besson, Jean and Barry Chevannes. "The Continuity-Creativity Debate: The Case of Revival." *New West Indian Guide* 70.3&4 (1990): 209-28.

Besson, Jean. "Religion as Resistance in Jamaican Peasant Life: The Baptist Church, Revival Worldview and Rastafari Movement." *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews.* Ed. Barry Chevannes. London: MacMillan, 1995. 43-75.

Bhabha, Homi K. "The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism." *The Location of Culture.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 66-84.

Bibb, Henry. *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave Written by Himself.* 1849. *Puttin' On Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup.* Ed. Gilbert Osofsky. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and Row, 1969. 53-171.

Bone, Robert A. *The Negro Novel in America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.

Bordo, Susan R.. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault." *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowledge.* Eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1989. 13-33.

Bosman, William. *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea.* 1704. London: Frank Cass, 1967.

Boxwell, D.A. "'Sis Cat' as Ethnographer: Self-Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men.*" *African American Review* 26.4 (1992): 605-617.

Brand, Dionne. *In Another Place, Not Here.* Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1996.

Brodber, Erna. "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure." *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference.* Ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe. Wellesley, Mass.: Calaloux P, 1990. 164-168.

-----. *Myal.* London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1988.

de Brosses, Charles. *Du Culte des Dieux Fetiches.* 1760 Paris: Fayard, 1988.

Byerman, Keith E. "Beyond Realism: The Fictions of Toni Morrison." *Fingering the Jagged Grain: Tradition and Form in Recent Black Fiction.* Athens: U of Georgia P, 1985. 184-216.

Callahan, John F. "'A Long Way from Home': The Art and Protest of Claude McKay and James Baldwin." *Contemporary Literature* 34.4 (Winter 1993): 767-76.

Campbell, Horace. *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney.* London: Hansib P, 1985.

Campbell, Mavis C. *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal.* Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1988.

Carby, Hazel. "The Politics of Fiction: Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston." *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Ed. Michael Awkward. Cambridge: Cambrige UP, 1990. 71-93.

Cesaire, Aimee. *Return to My Native Land.* Trans. John Berger and Anna Bostock. 1959. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1969.

Chesnutt, Charles. *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales.* Edited and with an introduction by Richard H. Brodhead. Durham & London: Duke UP, 1993.

Chesnutt, Helen M. *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1952.

Chevannes, Barry. "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica." *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews.* Ed. Barry Chevannes. London: MacMillan, 1995. 3-19.

------. "New Approach to Rastafari." *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews.* 20-41.

-----. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology.* Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1994.

Chireau, Yvonne. *Conjuring: An Analysis of African-American Folk Beliefs and Practices.* Ann Arbor, MI: U Microfilms Intl, 1994.

Christian, Barbara. "The Race for Theory." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 348-359.

Cliff, Michelle. *Abeng.* New York: Crossing, 1984.

-----. *No Telephone to Heaven.* New York: Vintage Intl., 1989.

Cohn, Norman. *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom.* 1975. London: Pimlico, 1993.

Cooke, Michael G. "Claude McKay and V.S. Reid: The Simple Way to 'Magical Form.'" *Claude McKay: Centennial Studies.* Ed. A.L. McLeod New Dheli: Sterling P, 1992. 41-49.

Cooper, Carolyn. *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*. London: MacMillan P, 1993.

-----. "Race and the Cultural Politics of Self-Representation: A View from the University of the West Indies." *Research in African Literatures* 27.4 (Winter 1996): 97-105.

-----. "'Something Ancestral Recaptured': Spirit Possession as Trope in Selected Feminist Fictions of the African Diaspora." *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia*. Ed. Susheila Nasta. London: The Women's Press, 1991. 64-87.

Creel, Margaret Washington. *'A Peculiar People': Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs*. New York and London: New York UP, 1988.

Cribb, Timothy J. "Toward the Reading of Wilson Harris." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17.2 (Summer 1997): 59-62.

Cudjoe, Selwyn, ed. *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*. Wellesley, Mass: Calaloux Publications, 1990.

Cumber Dance, Daryl. "Go Eena Kumbla: A Comparison of Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*." *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays From the First International Conference* Ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe. Wellesley, Mass.: Calaloux P, 1990. 169-186.

Dash, Julie. *Daughters of the Dust*. Written and directed by Julie Dash. Produced by Julie Dash and Arthur Jafa. New York: Geechee Girls product from American playhouse in association with WMG, released by Kino Int. Co., 1991.

Dash, Michael. "Marvellous Realism: The Way Out of Negritude." *Caribbean Studies* 13: 4 (1973): 57-70.

Davies, Carole Boyce and Elaine Savory Fido, eds. *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990.

Davis, Cynthia. "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*. 23.3 (Summer 1982): 323-42.

Deren, Maya. *Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti*. Preface by Joseph Campbell. New York: Chelsea House, 1970.

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations*. Trans. by Laurence J. Lafleur. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. 1845. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Mentor, Penguin, 1987.

Drake, Sandra E. *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition: A New Architecture of the World*. New York: Greenwood P, 1986.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk. Three Negro Classics*. Introduction by John Hope Franklin. New York: Avon Books, 1965. 213-388.

-----. "Criteria of Negro Art." *Within the Circle*. Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 60-68.

Dubey, Madhu. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994.

Durkheim, Emile. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. New York: The Free Press, 1915.

Elkins, W.F. *Black Power in the Caribbean: The Beginnings of the Modern National Movement.* New York: Revisionist Press, 1977.

-----. *Street Preachers, Faith Healers and Herb Doctors in Jamaica.* New York: Revisionist Press, 1977.

Ellison, Ralph. "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke." *Shadow and Act.* New York: Vintage, Random House, 1995. 45-59.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967.

-----. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Fisher, Rudolph. *The Conjure-Man Dies.* New York: Covici, Friede, 1932.

Foreman, Gabrielle. "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call." *Feminist Studies* 18.2 (Summer 1992): 369-388.

Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Church in America.* New York: Schocken Books, 1964.

Freeman, Alma S. "Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker: A Spiritual Kinship." *SAGE* 2.1 (Spring 1985): 37-40.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the 'Racial Self.'* New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

-----. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism.* New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

Gates, Henry Louis and Appiah, Anthony, eds. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present.* New York: Amistad, 1993.

Gayle, Addison. *Claude McKay: The Black Poet at War.* Detroit, Michigan: Broadside Press, 1972.

Genovese, Eugene G. *Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World.* Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1979.

-----. *Roll, Jordan, Roll.* New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1976.

Georgia Writers' Project, Work Project Administration. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940.

Gilkes, Michael. *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel.* Trinidad and Jamaica: Longman Caribbean Ltd., 1975.

Glenn Menke, Pamela. "'The Lips of Books': Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as Metalingual Texts." *The Literary Griot* 4.1,2 (Spring-Fall 1992): 75-99.

Goudie, S.X. "'Leavin' a Mark on the Wor(l)d: Marksmen and Marked Men in *Middle Passage.*" *African American Review* 29.1 (Spring 1995): 109-22.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason." *Feminist Epistemologies.* Eds. Linda

Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter. New York: Routlege, 1993. 187-215.

-----. "Notes Towards A Corporeal Feminism." *Australian Feminist Studies.* 5 (Summer 1987): 1-15.

Guy, Rosa. *The Sun, the Sea, and a Touch of the Wind.* New York: Penguin, 1995.

Harris, Trudier. *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison.* Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991.

Harris, Wilson. "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas." *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966-1981.* 20-42.

-----. "The Life of Myth and its Possible Bearing on Erna Brodber's Fictions: *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and *Myal.*" *Kunapipi* 12.3 (1990): 86-92.

-----. *Palace of the Peacock.* London: Faber and Faber, 1960.

-----. *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks.* Eds. Alan Riach and Mark Williams. Liege, Belgium: Universite de Liege, 1992.

-----. "A Talk on the Subjective Imagination." *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966-1981.* Ed. with an introduction by Hena Maes-Jelinek. Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1981.

-----. *Womb of Space.* London: Greenwood P, 1983.

Haskins, Jim. *Voodoo and Hoodoo: Their Tradition and Craft as Revealed by Actual Practitioners.* New York: Stein and Day, 1978.

Hegel, *The Philosophy of History.* Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Dover, 1956.

Hemenway, Robert. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.

Henderson, Mae. "Toni Morrison's Beloved: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text." *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text.* Ed. Hortense Spillers. New York: Routledge, 1991. 62-85.

Herskovits, Melville J. *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom.* Vol. I & II. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1967

-----. *The Myth of the Negro Past.* 1941. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.

Heuman, Gad, ed. *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance, and Marronage.* Great Britain: Frank Cass, 1986.

Holton, Robert. "Bearing Witness: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved.*" *English Studies in Canada* 20.1 (Mar 1994): 79-90.

hooks, bell. *Talking Back.* Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988.

Hope Scott, Joyce. "Black Folk Ritual in *Home to Harlem* and *Black Thunder.*" *Claude McKay: Centennial Studies.* Ed. A.L. McLeod. New Dheli: Sterling P, 1992.

Hopkins, Pauline. *Contending Forces.* 1900. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Black Death." *The Complete Stories.* Series Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Harper Collins, 1995. 202-08.

-----. *Dust Tracks On A Road.* Series Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. 1942. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.
-----. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." *I Love Myself When I'm Laughing.* Ed. Alice Walker. New York: Feminist Press, 1979. 152-155.
-----. *Jonah's Gourd Vine.* Series Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.
-----. *Mules and Men.* Series Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.
-----. *Moses, Man of the Mountain.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
-----. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica.* Series Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Harper and Row, 1990. Reprinted as *Voodoo Gods: An Inquiry into Native Myths and Magic in Jamaica and Haiti.* London: Dent, 1939.
-----. *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* 1937. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1978.
-----. "What White Publishers Won't Print." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 117-21.
Johnson, Barbara. "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*" *Black Literature and Literary Theory.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. New York and London: Methuen, 1984. 205-219.
Johnson, Charles. *Being and Race: Black Writing Since 1970.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988.
-----. *The Middle Passage.* New York: Atheneum, 1990.
Johnson, Charles, and Ron Chernow. *In Search of a Voice.* Washington: Library of Congress, 1991.
Johnson, Clifton J., ed. *God Struck Me Dead: Religious Conversion Narratives and Autobiographies of Ex-Slaves.* Philadelphia and Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1969.
Johnson, James Weldon, ed. *The Book of American Negro Poetry.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1922.
Jordan, June. "On Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston." *Black World* (Aug 1974): 4-8.
Kearney, Richard. *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination.* New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995.
Kerboull, Jean. *Voodoo and Magic Practices.* Trans. John Shaw. 1973. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1978.
Kesteloot, Lilyan. *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude.* Trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy. Washington D.C.: Howard UP, 1991.
Khan, Ismith. *The Obeah Man.* 1964. Toronto: Oxford, 1995.
Kieckhefer, Richard. *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500.* London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.
-----. *Magic in the Middle Ages.* 1989. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.
Kincaid, Jamaica. *Annie John.* New York: Penguin, 1986.
Kutzinski, Vera M. "New Personalities: Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Wilson Harris's Recent Fiction." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17.2 (Summer 1997): 72-76.

Laguerre, Michel S. "An Ecological Approach to Voodoo." *Freeing the Spirit* 3.1 (1974).

-----. *Voodoo Heritage.* London: Sage Publications, 1980.

Lamming, George. *Season of Adventure.* 1960. London: Allison and Busby, 1979.

Lang, George. "Islands, Enclaves, Continua: Notes Toward a Comparative History of Caribbean Creole Literatures." *A History of Literature in the Caribbean.* Vol III Ed. A. James Arnold. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins P, 1997. 29-56.

Lawrence, David. "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in *Beloved.*" *Studies in American Fiction* 19.2 (1991): 189-201.

Lenz, Gunter. "Southern Exposures: The Urban Experience and the Re-Construction of Black Folk Culture and Community in the Works of Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston." *History and Tradition in Afro-American Culture.* Ed. Gunter Lenz. Frankurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1984. 84-117.

LeSeur, Geta. "Claude McKay's Marxism." *The Harlem Renaissance: Revaluations.* Eds. Amritjit Singh, William S. Shiver, and Stanley Brodwin. New York: Garland, 1989. 219-31.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness.* Oxford and London: Oxford UP, 1977. 219-31.

Lionnet, Francoise. "Autoethnography: The An-Archic Style of *Dust Tracks on a Road.*" *Autobiographical Voices.* Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1989. 97-129.

Locke, Alain. "Black Truth and Black Beauty." *The Critics and The Harlem Renaissance.* Ed. Cary D. Wintz. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996. 266-70.

-----. "The New Negro." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 21-31.

-----. "The Saving Grace of Realism." *The Critics and The Harlem Renaissance.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 272-76.

Lucas, J. Olumide. *The Religion of the Yorubas.* Lagos: C.M.S.Bookshop, 1948.

MacGaffey, Wyatt. "Fetishism Revisted: Kongo *Nkisi* in Sociological Perspective." *Africa* 47.2 (1977): 172-184.

Maes-Jelinek, Hena. "Charting the Uncapturable in Wilson Harris's Writing." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction.* 17.2 (Summer 1997): 90-97.

-----. *The Naked Design.* Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1976.

-----. "'Numinous Proportions': Wilson Harris's Alternative to all 'Posts.' *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism.* Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1990. 47-63.

-----. *Wilson Harris.* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982.

Mair, Lucille Mathurin. "Recollections of a Journey into a Rebel Past." *Caribbean Women Writers.* 51-60.

Mais, Roger. *Brother Man.* London: Heinemann, 1974.

Manuel, Frank E. *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959.

de Marees, Pieter. *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea.* 1602. Trans. and Eds. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Marshall, Paule. *Praisesong for the Widow.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1983.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

McDowell, Deborah. "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism." *Within the Circle.* 428-441.

McFarlane, Milton. *Cudjoe the Maroon.* London: Allison & Busby, 1977.

McKay, Claude. *A Long Way From Home.* New York: Lee Furman, 1937.

-----. *Banana Bottom.* Chatham, New Jersey: The Chatham Bookseller, 1933.

-----. *Banjo.* San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1929.

-----. *Home to Harlem.* 1928. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1987.

McMillan, Timothy J. "Black Magic: Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England." *Journal of Black Studies.* 25.1 September 1994, 99-117.

Meier, August. *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1963.

Melville, Pauline. *Shape-shifter.* London: The Women's Press, 1990.

Metraux, Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti.* Trans. Hugo Charteris. London: Andre Deutsch, 1959.

Mitchell, Angelyn, ed. *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present.* Durham and London: Duke UP, 1994.

Morrison, Toni. *Bluest Eye.* New York: Washington Square Press, 1970.

-----. "The Language Must Not Sweat." Interview by Thomas LeClair. *The New Republic* 21 Mar, 1981: 25-29.

-----. "Memory, Creation, and Writing." *Thought.* 59.235 (Dec 1984): 385-390.

-----. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

-----. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," *Black Women Writers 1950-1980): A Critical Evalutation.* Ed. Mari Evans. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1984.

-----. *Song of Solomon.* New York: Signet, 1978.

-----. *Sula.* New York: Plume, Penguin, 1973.

-----. *Tar Baby.* 1981. New York: Plume, Penguin, 1982.

-----. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (Winter 1989): 1-34.

Mullin, Gerald W.. *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia.* New York: Oxford UP, 1972.

Mullin, Michael. *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean*

1736-1831. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
Murphy, Joseph. *Working the Spirit*. Boston: Beacon UP, 1994.
Murray, Stuart. "Postcoloniality/Modernity: Wilson Harris and Postcolonial Theory." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17.2 (Summer 1997): 53-58.
Naipaul, V.S. *The Suffrage of Elvira*. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1985.
Nasta, Susheila, ed. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia*. London: The Women's Press, 1991.
Naylor, Gloria. *Bailey's Cafe*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992.
-----. *Mama Day*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988.
Nelson, Emmanuel S. "Black Folk Ritual in Home to Harlem and Black Thunder." *Claude McKay: Centential Studies*. Ed. A.L. McLeod. New Dheli: Sterling , 1992. 70-81.
Nelson-McDermott, Catherine. "Myal-ing Criticism: Beyond Colonizing Dialectics." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 24.4 (Oct 1993): 53-67.
O'Callaghan, Evelyn. "Engineering the Female Subject: Erna Brodber's *Myal*." *Kunapipi* 12.3 (1990): 93-103.
-----. *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*. London and Basingstoke: MacMillan P, 1993.
Owens, Joseph. *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica*. London: Heinemann, 1976.
Parry, Benita. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 36-44.
Patterson, Orlando. *The Children of Sisyphus*. Essex: Longman, 1964.
-----. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
Pelton, Robert D. *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.
Peters, Pearlie. "Women and Assertive Voice in Hurston's Fiction and Folklore." *The Literary Griot* 4.1,2 (Spring/Fall 1992): 100-110.
Petry, Ann. *The Street*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.
Pietz, William and Emily Apter, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993.
Pietz, William. "The Problem of the Fetish, I." *Res* 9 (Spring 1985): 5-17.
-----. "The Problem of the Fetish, II." *Res* 13 (Spring 1987): 23-45.
-----. "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa." *Res* 16 (Autumn 1988): 105-123.
Pinsker, Sanford. "Magical Realism, Historical Truth, and the Quest for a Liberating Identity: Reflections on Alex Haley's *Roots* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*."

Studies in Black American Literature Vol 1: Black American Prose Theory. Ed. Joe Weixlmann and Charles J. Fontenot. Greenwood, Florida: The Penkevill Pub. Co., 1984. 183-196.

Plato. *The Republic.* Trans. Benjamin Jowlett. 3rd ed. Vol 1. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1908.

Post, Ken. "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica, 1930-38." *African Perspectives: Papers in the History, Politics, and Economics of Africa Presented to Thomas Hodgkin.* Ed. Christopher Allen and R.W. Johnson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970. 185-207.

Price, Richard, ed. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973.

Price-Mars, Jean. *Ainsi parla l'oncle: An Essay on Ethnography.* Compiegne: Bibliotheque Hatienne, 1928.

Pryse, Majorie and Hortense Spillers, eds. *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.

Puri, Shalini. "An 'Other' Realism: Erna Brodber's *Myal.*" *Ariel* 24.3 (July 1993): 95-115.

Rabinowitz, Paula. "Naming, Magic, and Documentary: The Subversion of the Narrative in *Song of Solomon, Ceremony,* and *China Men.*" *Feminist Revisions: What Has Been and Might Be.* Eds. Vivian Patraka and Louise Tilly. Ann Arbor, Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1983. 26-42.

Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South.* New York: Oxford UP, 1978.

Ramchand, Kenneth. *The West Indian Novel and its Background.* 1970. London: Heinemann, 1983.

Rattray, R.S. *Religion and Art in Ashanti.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927.

Reed, Ishmael. *Mumbo Jumbo.* New York: Doubleday and Co, 1972.

Reich, Alice. "Pheoby's Hungry Listening." *Women's Studies* 13 (1986): 163-69.

Rhodes, Jewell Parker. *Voodoo Dreams.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea.* New York: Popular Library, 1996.

Rowe, Maureen. "The Women in Rastafari." *Caribbean Quarterly* 26.4 (Dec 1980): 13-21.

Rushdy, Ashraf. "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*" *American Literature* 64.3 (Sept 1992): 567-97.

-----. "The Phenomenology of the Allmuseri: Charles Johnson and the Subject of the Narrative of Slavery." *African American Review* 26.3 (Fall 1992): 373-94.

-----. "The Properties of Desire: Form of Slave Identity in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage.*" *Arizona Quarterly* 50.2 (Summer 1994): 73-108.

Sadoff, Dianne F. "Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2.2 (1985): 4-26.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage, Random, 1979.
Schafer, Uwe. "'both/and' and/or 'either/or': Syncreticism and Imagination in the Novels of Wilson Harris and Bessie Head." *Fusion of Cultures?* Eds. Peter O. Stummer and Christopher Balme. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996.
Schuler, Monica. "Myalism and the African Religious Tradition in Jamaica." *Africa and the Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link.* Ed. Margaret E. Crahan and Franklin W. Knight. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1979. 65-79.
Scott, Daniel M. "Interrogating Identity: Appropriation and Transformation in *Middle Passage.*" *African American Review* 29.4 (Winter 1995): 645-55.
Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1990.
Sharpe, Jenny. "Figures of Colonial Resistance." *Modern Fiction Studies.* 35.1 (1989): 137-155.
Sharrad, Paul. "The Art of Memory and the Liberation of History: Wilson Harris's Witnessing of Time." *Callaloo* 18.1 (1995): 94-108.
Shaw, Gregory. "Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris." *The New Left Review.* 153 (Sept/Oct 1985): 121-28.
Shepherd McClain, Carol. *Women as Healers: Cross-Cultural Perspectives.* New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1989.
Simpson, George Eaton. *Black Religions in the New World.* New York: Columbia UP, 1978.
Skerrett, Jr., Joseph T. "Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon.*" *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition.* 192-201.
Slemon, Stephen and Helen Tiffin, eds. *After Europe.* Sydney: Dangeroo, 1989.
Slemon, Stephen. "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse." *Canadian Literature.* 116 (1988): 9-24.
-----. "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature.* 23.1 (1988): 157-168.
-----. "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World." *World Literature Written in English.* 30.2 (1990): 30-41.
Smith, Barbara. "Toward A Black Feminist Criticism." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 410-427.
Smith, William. *A New Voyage to Guinea.* London: J. Nourse, 1744.
Sobel, Mechal. *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988.
Sollers, Werner, ed. *The Invention of Ethnicity.* New York: Oxford, 1989.
Spillers, Hortense J. "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love." *Feminist Studies* 9.2 (Summer 1983): 293-323.
Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice." *Wedge* 7.4 (1985): 120-30.

Starobin, Robert S., ed. *Denmark Vesey: The Slave Conspiracy of 1822.* Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Steele, Fernanda. "Breaking Down Barriers as Genesis of a New Beginning in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock.*" *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17. 2 (Summer 1997): 63-66.

Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative.* Urbana, Chicago, London: U of Illinois P, 1979.

Tallant, Robert. *Voodoo in New* Orleans. Gretna: Pelican, 1974.

Taylor, Patrick. *The Narrative of Liberation: Perspectives on Afro-Caribbean Literature, Popular Culture, and Politics.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.

Teish, Luisah. *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals.* San Francisco: Harper, 1985.

Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy.* New York: Random House, 1983.

Tiffin, Helen. "Cold Hearts and (Foreign) Tongues: Recitation and the Reclamation of the Female Body in the Works of Erna Brodber and Jamaica Kincaid." *Callaloo* 16.4 (Fall 1993): 909-21.

-----. "Decolonization and Audience: Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place.*" *SPAN* (April 30, 1990): 27-38.

Toliver, Victoria. "Vodun Iconography in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock.*" *Callaloo* 18.1 (1995): 173-190.

Torres-Saillant, Silvio. "The Cross-Cultural Unity of Caribbean Literature: Toward a Centripetal Vision." *A History of Literature in the Caribbean.* Vol lll Ed. A. James Arnold. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins P, 1997. 57-76.

Tourgee, Albion Winegar. *A Fool's Errand.* Edited by John Hope Franklin. Cambridge: Belknap P, 1961.

Walby, Celestin. "The African Sacrificial Kingship Ritual and Johnson's *Middle Passage.*" *African American Review* 29.4 (Winter 1995): 657-69.

Walcott, Derek. "The Muse of History." *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean.* Ed. Orde Coombs. New York: Doubleday, 1974. 2-27.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple.* New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, 1982.

-----. *Meridian.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

-----. *Possessing the Secret of Joy.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.

-----. "Saving the Life that is Your Own." *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983. 3-14.

-----. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 401-409.

Warner-Lewis, Maureen. *The Nkuyu: Spirit Messengers of the Kumina.* Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1977.

Wedenoja, William. "Mothering and the Practice of 'Balm' in Jamaica." *Women as Healers: Cross-Cultural Perspectives.* Ed. Carol Shepherd McClain. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1989. 73-75.

White, Hayden. "The Irrational and the Problem of Historical Knowledge in the Enlightenment." *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture: Irrationalism in the Eighteenth Century.* Vol 2 Ed. Harold E. Pagliaro. Cleaveland and London: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972. 303-321.

-----. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973.

Wideman, John Edgar. *Sent for You Yesterday.* New York: Avon Books, 1983.

Wilentz, Gay. "Toward a Diaspora Literature: Black Women Writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States." *College English.* 54.4 (1992): 385-405.

-----. "Wilson Harris's Divine Comedy of Existence: Miniaturizations of the Cosmos in *Palace of the Peacock.*" *Kunapipi.* 8.2 (1986): 56-66.

Wood, Peter. *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy.* New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1937.

-----. "Blueprint for Negro Writing." *Within the Circle.* Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. 97-106.

Wynter, Sylvia. *The Hills of Hebron.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962.

Yeats, W.B. *Collected Poems.* London: St. Martin's Street, 1950.

-----. *A Vision.* London: Macmillan P, 1937.

Young, Robert. *White Mythologies: Writing History and The West.* London and New York: Routledge, 1990.